

PLAYS AND PLAYERS
LEAVES FROM
A CRITIC'S SCRAPBOOK
—
WALTER PRICHARD EATON

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THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM

Act I

PLAYS AND PLAYERS

LEAVES FROM A CRITIC'S SCRAPBOOK

by

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

author of

"The Idyl of Twin Fires," "The Bird House Man"
"The American Stage of Today," etc.

Preface by

BARRETT H. CLARK

CINCINNATI

STEWART & KIDD COMPANY

1916

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Almanac

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Almanac

TO
A. E. THOMAS

PREFACE

DRAMATIC CRITICISM IN AMERICA

The question has often been asked in this country, Can there be absolutely free and untrammelled criticism of the drama in the daily newspaper? The recent case of the New York *Times* and the Shuberts aroused a vast amount of discussion, some of which it may not be amiss to resuscitate with a view to arriving at a more or less definite conclusion as to the status of newspaper criticism.

A year ago last March Alexander Woollcott, dramatic critic of the *Times*, reviewed "Taking Chances," a Shubert production; in his review, he spoke of its being "not vastly amusing," of its plot being "quite absurd," the second act "vulgar and tedious," and characterized the whole as a "bedroom farce." The review called forth a public statement from the Shubert office to the effect that "some of the critics, lacking in humor, may try to make you believe that somewhere there is something just a little bit off the line in 'Taking Chances.' " The managing editor of the *Times* was the recipi-

ent of the seats for the next Shubert production, but it was stipulated that Mr. Woollcott should not be permitted inside the theater. Mr. Van Anda, the managing editor, a man who, in the words of Samuel Hopkins Adams, "holds to the old-fashioned creed that a newspaper should be edited by the editors and not by the advertisers," returned the tickets forthwith. A short while after, Mr. Woollcott purchased seats at the Maxine Elliott Theater, was refused admittance, and at once brought suit against the management to establish his right to enter a theater after having bought tickets. And the *Times* therewith refused to take all Shubert advertisements, and for nearly a year to mention any Shubert play, actor or production. The deadlock remained, then, until the Shubert office, of its own accord, invited Mr. Woollcott to return to their theaters, and the *Times*, in turn, resumed its relations with them by accepting advertisements and press "stories."

The whole case may at first appear very much in the same light as the cases of other critics of Walter Prichard Eaton and the *New York Sun*, of Channing Pollock, of Percy Hammond; but there are two highly significant points to which attention must be directed. First, contrary to the usual custom, it was not the Shuberts who withdrew their ad-

vertising from the *Times*, but the *Times* that refused to accept Shubert "copy"; and, finally, it was the Shubert office that came to the *Times*, *after* the courts had given the Shuberts the right to exclude Mr. Woollcott from their theaters, and invited Mr. Woollcott to return; and this in spite of Lee Shubert's statement that "During all this period that this man has been writing these things about our plays and of the plays that were produced at our theaters, the New York *Times* received on an average of from \$600 to \$700 a week for advertising the very plays which this man condemned. We paid the paper on an average of \$35,000 a year."

The law, many times tested, is clear: the management of a theater can exclude whom it likes; it is a private concern, not a public institution. And yet, the Shuberts invited Mr. Woollcott to return to their houses. They lost no love for Mr. Woollcott: *they needed the paper.*

Now, the New York *Times* happened to be able to afford to do without the \$35,000 a year from the Shuberts; had it, however, like some New York newspapers, and most others, been unable to sustain the loss, it would have had to discharge Mr. Woollcott. In that event, the *Times* would have found it necessary to heed the credo of the Shubert office:

PREFACE

"If it becomes known that any production that is made in one of our theaters is sure to be condemned by one of the leading papers in this city, that producer will not bring his production to our theater unless we exclude the dramatic critic of that newspaper from the attraction. I have been threatened that unless I get fair commented [!] criticism for a production made in my theaters, that the production will be taken elsewhere."

The simple method of the *Times*, employed without malice, with no threatenings, without blare of trumpets, has triumphed. It is not moral, it is not exactly pleasant to reflect upon, but it is efficacious; it is the only possible weapon with which to combat the decidedly unethical weapons of such managers as declare that (referring to the *Times* critic) "The plaintiff, from the commencement of his employment with the New York *Times*, has shown his bitter feeling and animosity against the defendants and has uniformly written scathing articles concerning the productions made by the defendants and each of them."

There are perhaps half a dozen New York newspapers able to do what the *Times* did, and possibly a few more than that outside the metropolis. A great many of the weeklies and most of the monthlies

are likewise free to say what they please, but these last are valuable chiefly as leisurely comments, and not as critical estimates directly affecting audiences from day to day.

The first important step has been taken: a rich newspaper can stand behind its critic, against the manager; but what of the paper that must depend on the revenue from each of its heavy advertisers? Obviously, and unfortunately, it must bow down to the dictates of those advertisers.

The whole situation as I have reviewed it in the above-cited example, is considered solely from the point of view of business; the dignity and importance of dramatic criticism as a part of the make-up of our daily newspaper I have not touched upon. Until criticism can be at least fairly free, it is useless to prate of it as an art; "criticism," dictated by the theater manager or the advertising manager, cannot rise even to the height of good reviewing. This is why we cannot afford to think of true dramatic criticism before we make way for true dramatic reviewing and reporting. So long as it is still possible for a manager to quote, "It is clean. We recommend it," for "It is clean. We have no hesitation in recommending it to the three little girls of 'Alice in Wonderland' who lived at the bottom of

the treacle well," just so long shall we remain where we are.

And lest I be suspected of the vice of pessimism, let me hasten to state that there are in this country to-day a few dramatic critics endowed not only with first-rate powers of perception and wide knowledge and experience, but with true literary distinction. These critics, for the most part, have been forced to write for magazines and special issues of newspapers; the remaining few could continue writing for the daily papers because they have been able to establish for themselves a real following of intelligent readers. It is to the critics of these two categories—and, fortunately two or three belong to both—that we must look for a future in the art and practice of dramatic criticism. It is with the hope that the present collection of varied papers, documents of contemporary interest and specimens of true criticism, will arouse a more genuine interest in and love for this difficult and somewhat neglected art, that I have induced Mr. Eaton to allow me to re-print these essays.

BARRETT H. CLARK.

Almost all of the reviews and essays in this volume have previously been printed in newspapers or magazines, the majority of them being part of a weekly record of the New York stage, contributed during the past six years to the daily press. They are reprinted here without change or addition; even the occasional prophecies have been left, if only to show the danger of donning Cassandra's robe. There is no pleasure for the critic in trying to doctor an old review, and no profit for the reader; he is almost sure thus to deprive it of its only value—that of an immediate and fresh impression. The writer's thanks are extended to the editors of the *Boston Transcript*, the *Indianapolis News*, the *Chicago Herald*, the *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, the *New York Times*, the *American Magazine* and the *Century*, for their kind permission to reprint.

W. P. E.

Stockbridge,
Massachusetts.

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SECTION I
AMERICAN PLAYS

PLAYING THE PIPER

“The Piper”—New Theater, January 30, 1911

One of the most common of tragedies on this somewhat imperfect planet results from lack of proper adjustment or the meeting at the right time of the right elements. A man who might have been a fine actor is born of Puritan parents and wastes his life peddling life insurance, while the daughter of his easy-going neighbors enters on a stage career, thus robbing the world of a perfectly good stenographer. An East Side gutter snipe, with a genius for finance, is left to shift for himself, without training or guidance, and ends his brief career in Sing Sing, while many a business, besides the railroads, is crying for efficient management.

And Josephine Preston Peabody of Cambridge, Mass., writes a poetic drama called “The Piper,” which takes a prize in England, only to have it produced at the New Theater with a woman in the title part, and thus what might have been a valuable object lesson to the public of the fact that a poetic

drama is not necessarily a dull and lifeless thing, is robbed of its chief appeal.

We are not inclined easily to forgive the New Theater for casting a woman, even Miss Matthison, as the Piper. We are not at all inclined to take any stock in the assertion that nobody else could be found for the part. We happen to know that Walter Hampden originally held the American rights to this drama, and we shrewdly suspect that his services could have been secured, even if Mr. Skinner, for whom the part was written, had declined to play it. Furthermore, we are not at all convinced that Jacob Wendell of the New Theater Company could not have played it. At least Mr. Wendell is a man. At least he has a sense of humor, blitheness, dash, charm. It was essential, at any rate, for a proper presentation of the play that some man should assume the title part.

That is as plain as A B C. The Piper was a man. He was not a ladylike man. He was not a somber, plaintive, sobby man. He was free, roving, humorous, kindly, shrewd, combative. He was as male as Chantecler. And there is no more reason why Miss Matthison should have been assigned to the part than why Miss Adams should have played Rostand's rooster. Indeed, there is less reason, for

the New Theater is not under a strictly "commercial" management.

It is rumored that Miss Matthison, like Miss Adams, is enamoured of the masculine rôles. Such a phenomenon is not new among actresses. The female Hamlets have been legion. Miss Matthison, it is reported, aspires to play the title part in her husband's drama, "The Servant in the House." But that is no reason for letting her do it. Probably she puts altogether too much stress on the power of her elocution. Her delivery of exalted speech is, indeed, beautiful and impressive, though inclined to become exceedingly monotonous at times. But the delivery of exalted speech is not the only, nor even the chief, means to the creation of illusion in a poetic rôle.

If that rôle be masculine the first and foremost requirement for the creation of illusion is masculinity. Any theater-goer knows this. A woman can play a boy's part, because she can look as much, or more, like a boy than a man can. But a woman cannot play a man's part as well as a man, and on a stage where for more than two centuries the sexes have assumed each its own characters there is pitifully little sense in her trying. She may succeed in creating something strange and wonderful, but for

the normal audience she will never create the character intended by the dramatist.

And another requirement of any rôle, more important for illusion than a musical elocution, is the personal attribute of humor, if that rôle be humorous, of pathos if it be pathetic, and so on. Now, the character of the Piper in Miss Peabody's play is full of humor. It is not farcical humor, to be sure. It is the glimmering, half wild humor of a rover down the windy world, of a lover of freedom and the open air, of a hater of shams and meanness. Did you ever know a hater of shams who did not grin in the midst of his most passionate denunciations, or a lover of children who had a sob in his voice? Can you think of the Pied Piper of Hamelin Town with a sob in his voice? A ring of defiance, of righteous rage, yes. But a sob—never!

Yet Miss Matthison, to whom was entrusted the part of the Piper, has no humor in her playing. She never has had. In all her impersonations she has never once convincingly played a humorous rôle. She may smile and smile, but you are unpersuaded. Moreover, her monotonous manner of delivery has of late been growing into something perilously akin to lachrimosity. Constantly through "The Piper" she has as distinct a sob in her voice as Caruso in

the famed finale to Act I of "Pagliacci." This is not the Pied Piper. This is neither the Piper of tradition, to whom, of course, Miss Peabody must to a certain extent bow, so fixed is he in our imaginations, nor is it the particular Piper of Miss Peabody's play. This is a plaintive woman reading the lines which belong to a full-blooded, defiant, yet deeply humorous man.

When, for instance, Miss Matthison, as the Piper, plays to the children in the cave whence "he" has lured them, "he" dances among them, piping the while, and they are supposed to clap their hands enraptured. Now, Miss Matthison dances amid the little folks most gracefully. Every move she makes has feminine charm, poetic rhythm. And every move she makes destroys by so much more the illusion. The Pied Piper didn't dance according to the approved methods of Delsarte or Miss Duncan. The chances are he didn't dance at all. If he did he probably hopped grotesquely, giving as close an imitation as he could of the inimitable steps of Fred Stone.

You never in your life saw a child enraptured by Isadora Duncan, but there never was a child yet who wouldn't follow Fred Stone to the ends of the world.

In other words, Miss Matthison here is doing

exactly what has been done so often before in the poetic drama, making it seem absurd to the average audience. She is taking the life, the naturalness out of it. She is making it artificial, "artistic" and hence unillusive. She can do more harm by five minutes of such pretty posing than she can do good by a whole evening's musical recitation of the verse.

Now, all this comment wouldn't be worth the time it takes to read it, let alone the time it takes to write it, were "*The Piper*" one of those ordinary "poetic dramas" which have been turned out with the regularity of clockwork for many a year, only to fail on the stage, if they ever reached the stage, not because they were poetic, but because they were not human, vital, interesting and uncontaminated with pose and the straining after "literary" speech.

But "*The Piper*" is not such a play. It is a human and an interesting narrative, badly constructed, to be sure, in its central portions, so that the second and third acts "sag," but full of life, color, simple emotions, and the talk of human beings.

Because the dramatic interest is not sustained in the central portions, "*The Piper*" can never rank as a completely successful play. The author has

made the grave error of building up her leading “clash of wills” not between two persons seen at the struggle, but between the Piper and the figure of Christ on a roadside cross; that is, in the brain and heart of one character, revealed through soliloquy. Save with a poet of great genius and an actor of equal force such a method is hopeless. But none the less her play does have enough sheer dramatic value and enough popular interest to win a wide public, to charm them by the music of its verse and the human quality of its story.

It is important, then, that such a play reach a public only too ready to scorn the poetic drama, under the best possible conditions—that is, with its human appeal telling at the full value, its direct, simple emotional quality made the most of.

To put a woman in the title part is to strike at the roots of its human appeal, to rob it of naturalness, of illusion; to fill it with pose and affectation. We prefer as a people to-day the realistic drama of contemporary life. Would we endure for a moment seeing a woman play the leading male rôle in “The Boss,” or “The Man of the Hour,” or “Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford”? Of course we would not, and of course we should not. But by some crazy process of reasoning some of us seem to

suppose that the poetic drama can be treated in quite a different manner, that it may be "artistic" for a woman to play male rôles in such drama, though everybody is perfectly well aware that it is totally inartistic and futile for her to play male rôles in the drama of the hour.

After all, this attitude not only is an insult to the poetic drama, since it presupposes a kind of unreality and lack of sanity in that form, but it is the greatest possible foe to the popular acceptance of the poetic drama. That drama, to succeed with the mass of theater-goers, must seem real, human, interesting, close to the life of the people. It never succeeded in any nation, at any time, when it was not real and vital to the people. It never succeeded when it was treated as an exotic, as something remote and "artistic," and it never will.

There is no reason why it should.

If it is something exotic, remote, then it isn't worth doing at all. If it is to be treated any differently from the drama which is real and vital to us, there is no reason on earth why we should go to see it. The poetic drama is of value only in so far as it can persuade us that it is just as much drama as the prose form, with the added beauty of heightened speech and a more exalted spiritual outlook.

It is the great superiority of "The Piper" over most of the recent attempts at poetic drama that it can persuade us of this. Even at the New Theater, in a production admirable in nearly all respects save the sex of the leading player, it in no small degree persuades us. But the persuasion might have been complete and the play a popular success had the mistake not been made of casting a woman in the title rôle. Hence that error is of considerable importance, for it vitally concerns the spread of poetry on our stage.

“KINDLING”—AN HONEST PLAY

“Kindling”—Daly’s Theater, December 5, 1911

Two or three weeks ago, when four women stars all came to town at once, it was remarked that the two more popular and expert players, Miss Barrymore and Nazimova, were exploited in presumably the best foreign plays to be had. The other women, Miss Illington and Miss Ferguson, had to fall back on untried, native material.

Behold, of the four plays, “Kindling,” in which Miss Illington is appearing at Daly’s, is by far the most effective for American audiences, and next to it in interest ranks “The First Lady of the Land,” in which Miss Ferguson is appearing. We hardly need better proof of the waning of adaptations on our stage, or of the English play which has nothing to recommend it above our own product except a London run.

“Kindling” is the work of a California newspaper writer, Charles Kenyon. It is said that Mr. Kenyon has previously written several vaudeville sketches, but that this is his first long play. It has

much of the crudity and alternate stiffness and naturalness of the first play of a promising writer. But, like Joseph Patterson's "The Fourth Estate," it has in combination with the crudity, or rather behind the crudity, a certain quality of sincerity and directness that make it worth attention, and that lift it at times above all considerations of technique.

"Kindling" is the story of Maggie Schultz, wife of a stevedore, and the scene is her miserable home in a tenement. Maggie's husband is one of those German laborers who reads and goes to meetings and has social theories, and is consequently called "dangerous" by the master class, which doesn't want any theories except its own. One of his theories—which, if it is often held in the slums, is certainly seldom practiced—is that people like him and Maggie should not bring children into the world, to grow up to almost inevitable illhealth in the gutters—human kindling. This theory he dins into Maggie's ears, and he is aided by certain settlement workers who trail their silk gowns a little too ostentatiously through this play.

But Maggie represents the dumb, irrepressible maternal instinct of the female of the species. She accepts the doctrine, but her answer is that if it is wrong to bring children into a slum world, then the

way out is to escape from the slum world—not to have no children at all.

She and Heinie want to get out to Wyoming. Heinie hasn't the money. There is a strike on, and he cannot earn money. But, as Mr. Kipling has informed us, the female of the species is more deadly than the male. There is no passive resistance in Maggie's maternal code. Besides, it is a secret between her and the audience that the baby is already more than theoretical. Maggie steals to get money, so that he may be born in the pure air of Wyoming.

A good deal of the dramatic machinery by which this theft is accomplished, and by which it finally becomes known to the husband, is plausible enough. It is simply not fitted together into a smooth-working engine. Again, after Maggie confesses to her husband that a baby is really expected, and he realizes the true reason for her theft and sturdily stands by her, the final act is not quite firmly knit to sustain the suspense as to Maggie's fate, though, of course, in the end the rich people whom she has robbed drop their charge against her and presumably realize a little better the dread problems of poverty. In spite of these defects, however, the second and last acts of the play are poignant and sincere, and it is a very hard-hearted theater-goer indeed who

can hear Maggie say, as the final curtain leaves her in her husband's arms, “Maybe there are roses in Wyoming,” without a choke in the throat.

It happens that Miss Illington was last seen in New York in “The Thief.” In that drama she played the part of a woman who stole, not from sheer dishonesty, but to dress well enough to keep the “love” of her husband, as love is understood in the French drama. Technically the Bernstein play is as far superior to Mr. Kenyon's piece as the great traditions of French playwriting are older than ours. But yet the crude American drama has something for us the other has not. It has a spiritual quality, it has honest and unaffected sympathy for the poor, it has a fair and square recognition that social relations go out beyond the boudoir into the slums and tenements. It thrills us less than “The Thief,” it pleases less by well ordered action and suspense, the delight of craftsmanship; but what it loses thus it more than makes up in sympathy. It came unheralded and undescribed into New York. It won its way on its merits. These are the merits of honest purpose, warm sympathy and a deep, if crude, emotionalism.

Bernstein is interested in drama, Mr. Kenyon in human beings.

Miss Illington, as Maggie, has never played better. She does not, to be sure, attempt to reproduce a German dialect; she does not carry her character acting that far. But neither does she "talk tough." She strives for, and usually she achieves, a kind of rough, honest speech which marks well enough the social and intellectual level of her supposed Maggie, and then it appears to be her whole object to make Maggie a type of the maternal instinct struggling with whatever primitive weapons it may against the grim inhibitions and injustices of our modern industrialism. She never "shows off" in her acting in this play. She has no fine clothes to wear, and she acts the better without them. She slumps down into a rather dumpy, corsetless figure, and carries conviction to the eye as well as the ear. Her confession to her husband is a simple, sincere, touching piece of work. If the preceding scene of cross-questioning is not so effective, that is rather the dramatist's fault. Her final moments in the play are truly touching and beautiful. The part is a good one, an honest one, and one which appeals to the elemental sympathies of an audience. She has been wise enough to realize it, and has tried for no fireworks.



THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM

Act I

WARFIELD IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

*“The Return of Peter Grimm”—Belasco Theater,
October 17, 1911*

Occasionally David Warfield lays aside “The Music Master” long enough to produce a new play. He has done so to celebrate the advent of 1911, producing in Boston a new drama signed by David Belasco, called “The Return of Peter Grimm.” The present writer dared the east wind to see this new play. His trip to Boston was rewarded by an evening of rare and curious theatrical interest, even excitement. But it was not rewarded by any new revelations in David Warfield’s art, nor, indeed, by any very vivid character delineation even along the familiar lines of Warfield’s past achievements. “The Return of Peter Grimm” is interesting rather as a play, almost as a problem in stage management, than as a character picture painted by the actor. It is tremendously worth doing. But it is not worth doing for two seasons to the exclusion of everything else. Mr. Warfield should have it in a repertory.

Mr. Warfield is one of those rare players who is greater, or more interesting, than most plays. It is such men who owe it to the world to play many parts, to search out as variously as they can all corners of character and experience.

In his new drama, Mr. Belasco has deserted the realms of realism and of conventional emotion. Seeking always to be abreast of the hour, he has based a play on the alleged compact between the late William James and another scientist, that whichever died first should try his best to communicate with the living one if individuality persisted after death.

Peter Grimm, played by Mr. Warfield, is a very well-to-do and very amiable and lovable old tulip and orchid grower in a Hudson River town, settled by his Dutch ancestors. He evidently has a heart trouble. His old friend, Dr. Andrew MacPherson, enters into a compact with him similar to that which Professor James is said to have made. At the end of the first act Peter Grimm dies after he has, in his stubborn Dutch way, made his orphan ward, Kathrien, promise to marry his nephew, Frederik, in order to preserve the Grimm name and the Grimm tulip industry.

Now, Kathrien did not love Frederik, who was a

no-good fellow anyway, though her loving old guardian, in his pig-headedness, could not realize either fact. You saw tragedy impending for her. But so does Peter, apparently, as soon as he is dead. For in the second act he comes back, and the entire act is devoted to his efforts to communicate with the living in order to persuade the girl to break her promise and to follow rather the real dictates of her heart.

This is sheer supernaturalism. And in the manner in which it is put on the stage lies the chief interest and value of the play. It is a fascinating problem, and before the success of its solution the most skeptical and unimaginative must bow.

The supernatural is handled with the least possible use of conventional agencies. Peter Grimm's first entrance, to be sure, is effected on a dark stage, made plausible by a thunder shower outside and the coming of night. The living people in the room gradually have a kind of uneasiness; finally they light a lamp. Peter Grimm stands there in their midst, just as in life.

But they do not see him.

He talks to them and they do not hear him. He cries to them, and they do not heed. He cannot "get across," as he puts it. Only occasionally he

seems to affect their thoughts, to stir them to a vague unrest, and once his nephew fancies that he sees him, brushing the thought from his brain with a laugh.

Poor Peter beholds the preparations for the marriage going on in spite of him. He cannot, dead, undo the work he did while quick. He cannot induce Kathrien to break her bitter promise.

But there is in the house a little boy, Willem, the grandson of Peter's old housekeeper. Nobody knows who Willem's father was. His mother would never tell, and Willem was too young when his mother's betrayer left her to remember. Willem now has a fever. He is a sensitive child at all times. Now, in his fevered condition, he is doubly so. It is through him that Peter finally communicates.

Gradually, in a tense hush in the auditorium, Peter's words are felt to reach the boy's ear; gradually he speaks in reply. The doctor comes in, and Kathrien. The child tells them Peter has been in the room. The doctor struggles with him for proof. Peter urges him to tell who his father was, calling to his memory. The child answers the voice, seeming to the rest on the stage to address the empty air. Finally he tells those about him that his father was Frederik.

Now whether this was due to Peter or to a sudden

rising to the "threshold" of his consciousness (as Professor James would say) of a subconscious memory, is a moot point, very cleverly left by Mr. Belasco as a loophole of escape from any charges that he accepts spirit phenomena as proved. At any rate, the child's confession frees Kathrien from her hateful marriage, and Peter has accomplished his purpose.

The act is more than an hour long. It deals almost entirely with a supernatural situation, which might very well make the skeptic smile. Yet it is staged with such nice regard to what might be called a hypothetical possibility, and it is so replete with theatrical suspense and the emotional poignancy of a suffering soul—the soul of Peter Grimm suffering because he cannot communicate with his loved ones in the land of the living—that it holds the interest almost unflaggingly, after the first few moments of the tiresome Belasco comic relief are over, and for many will undoubtedly be fraught with a strange, uncanny thrill.

With this act, the play, as it at present stands, really ends. The last act is as mawkish as the death of Paul Dombey. Willem dies, and Peter Grimm takes him. It is better that he should be dead, better for all, poor little chap, says Peter. And Wil-

lem appears to want to die. Inasmuch as in act one he had been wild with joy at the prospect of a circus, and in act two had been eating cakes to his heart's content, there seemed no real reason either why his spirit should desire death or his body yield to it. But Peter makes his final exit with Willem on his shoulder—a modern Reaper with a frock coat and high hat—while the doctor contemplates a wax replica of the boy stretched out on the couch, after the style of the *Eden Musée*.

This act is pretty poor stuff. We learn nothing more about Peter Grimm. He evinces no sorrow that, after all, while he has accomplished his purpose in breaking off the marriage, he has not really talked to his loved ones, save through Willem. He tells us nothing of the compensating joys of the life hereafter. Perhaps, indeed, we should not expect that; we should hardly demand even of David Belasco a solution of the mystery of the ages. But at least, since we have been shown Peter's spirit returned to the scene of his life, it would be permissible and interesting to let us a little more into his sentiments and emotions, to make him and not little Willem the leading figure at the close. As the play stands now, it concludes for the audience at the end of act two.

The same setting remains for all three acts, and

it is a thing of great beauty—the interior of an old cottage, wainscoted with oak and with oak beams in the ceiling, hung with ancient Dutch portraits, and dominated by an old Dutch chimney piece full of niches and covered with crockery, pipes and a hundred suitable relics. In one corner stands a what-not bearing bowls of sprouting bulbs. By the fireplace are bundles of shoots wrapped up in sacking—precious plants which have been the source of the Grimm fortune, and really ought to be out in the moist greenhouse or store room! There is an old-fashioned square piano. The dining-room, off stage, is seen in its completeness when the door is opened, suggesting not the flies of a theater, but a real house extending off indefinitely. The landscape without has mellow charm. The house within has age and home-likeness and Dutch flavor. And, more important than all, in spite of its brightness and cheer, it is in some subtle way colored and shadow-filled to comport with the mood of supernatural visitation. It is a lovely setting for the lovely personality of David Warfield, and it exactly fits the mood of the drama.

But as this setting stands unchanged, it must be admitted that after a certain point is reached in the play, the character of Peter Grimm, which the actor

impersonates, also becomes stationary, even a little monotonous. After its purpose is accomplished of showing the perhaps possible interference in the affairs of the living by one dead, there is no longer any interest in the emotional existence of the spirit visitor. The play degenerates into mawkishness, and loses its potential poetry. We are sure William James would have had something more to say.

AS AUGUSTUS THOMAS THINKS

“As a Man Thinks”—39th Street Theater,
March 13, 1911

A new play by Augustus Thomas is likely to be at once interesting and important. Mr. Thomas, above our other native writers, combines technical skill with a genuine wit, a sense of style, and in recent years, at any rate, an intellectual purpose—that is to say, he keeps his story related to some definite idea and makes it seem significantly connected with what is taking place in the outer world of actual events.

The first play put forward by Mr. Thomas in this, his “later manner”—if we may employ the sententious term—was “The Witching Hour,” and that drama was remarkable for its skillful combination of an exciting theatrical story with a serious depiction of telepathic phenomena. It enjoyed a great success, with John Mason as the star. Mr. Thomas followed “The Witching Hour” with “The Harvest Moon,” a less successful play, this time

dealing with the dynamic power, for good or evil, of suggestion. Now at the Thirty-ninth Street Theater in New York he is exhibiting a third drama, called "As a Man Thinks," dealing still further with this dynamic power of suggestion, with mental health and sickness induced by our own habits of thought. Again John Mason is the star. And again the audiences are large.

Personally, we do not like this play so well as "The Witching Hour," though others like it better. It illustrates the extreme difficulties of the peculiar form of drama which endeavors to set forth an intellectual thesis in terms of a human and probable story. Successfully handled, this is an immensely stimulating form of drama, but it requires a man of great dramatic skill, and unquestioned intellectual authority as well, to handle it. Mr. Thomas disclosed no uncomfortable lack of either quality in "The Witching Hour." In the new play we feel a certain lack of the intellectual clarity needed. The story is there, but the intellectual significance of the story is not quite clear. The total effect is cloudy. Mr. Thomas appears to be groping. That is why we are a trifle surprised at the great popularity of "As a Man Thinks."

To tell the story of this drama would be at once

difficult and futile. Unlike the story of "The Harvest Moon," it is not simple, but extremely intricate, and the intricate stage play is only too often made to seem dull and confusing in narrative. Suffice it to say that the leading character is an elderly Jew, a noted New York doctor, and the plot concerns his relation with a Christian family, and the relations of other Jews and Christians with his own family, particularly his daughter. Here is one point where the intellectual clarity of the play is clouded. You are never sure how far Mr. Thomas means to illustrate the interrelations of Jews and Gentiles, or how far his emphasis is rather on the purely scientific and entirely unracial teachings of the doctor regarding mental health and right living and thinking. Indeed, the trouble with the play is perhaps that it possesses too great a wealth of material. Mr. Thomas had too many interests pressing upon him, each clamoring for exposition. In one act you feel that he is trying to tell some wholesome truths about Jewish character. In another you decide that he is trying to teach that there is one moral code for men, another for women, just as the world has long assumed, except, however, that Mr. Thomas does not teach this to extenuate the men, but still further to elevate the women, and through them the family.

Then, finally, when his doctor preaches the poisonous character of hate to the sick Christian lying on his bed and refusing to forgive either his apparently erring wife or the Jew with whom she has been indiscreet, you are convinced that Mr. Thomas after all is most concerned to teach once more his doctrine of the healing or destructive power of thought.

Confusion is the inevitable result. But, let us hasten to say, it is the confusion of wealth; and for that, at least, we may be thankful.

Another thing for which we may be thankful is the style with which the exposition is handled, and with which the play is mounted and acted. It is seldom that an American drama reaches our stage so genuinely distinguished by fine speech, by good manners and by a natural, easy, seemingly artless exposition of the characters and motives of the drama, not in terms of those terrible "Do you remember last year in Paris" speeches, but in terms of actual drama, which serves to explain all that has happened in the past without seeming at the moment to be explaining anything. Here is exposition, in other words, which at once explains the past and leads toward the future, toward the second act. This is style in playbuilding.

The opening act of "As a Man Thinks" is bound

to rank high in American drama. Every budding playwright should study it carefully. It is Continental in its finished ease and polish. When the first curtain sinks, for example, you have seen the drawing room of Dr. Seeling, the Jewish physician, at afternoon teatime. You have made the doctor's acquaintance, and accepted him as the finest type alike of his own race and the skilled and broad-minded doctor of the present day. You have fallen quite in love with his young daughter, and with the young Christian artist who you learn is in love with her. You have seen the Jewish art critic to whom she is engaged, felt the unpleasant quality which resides in him (and which his fiancée feels, too)—that racial quality of clever, obnoxious intrigue and callousness to a snub. You have seen the Christian wife of a rich magazine proprietor, and learned how she has been forced to forgive the amatory exploits of her husband. You have even seen the husband, a type of our American "self-made man who worships his creator," and are prepared to sympathize with this wife in her subsequent foolish revolt. You have heard all these people talking at an afternoon tea, on the familiar terms of intimate acquaintance, and thus you have learned who and what they are, but without seeming to have learned.

Rather have you seemed to remove one wall of the room and watched them off guard. The acting is good, the staging (by Mr. Thomas himself) excellent; hence the air of breeding, of easy manners, of correct speech and polite consideration and intelligent wit, is maintained. When the curtain descends you know these people. Many of them you like. You are prepared to take a great interest in their subsequent doings. This, we take it, is exposition at its very best; this is style in dramatic technique.

If Mr. Thomas could have decided at the end of this act which of several possible interests he wished to make the predominant one, and then kept more directly to that, he would have written a fine play, even though the plot is somewhat ordinary and the mere emotional interest lacking in tenseness. But he drifted off into various by-channels, and clouded its message.

It must be admitted, however, that he did his work so well in making his characters human in the first act that one never entirely loses regard for any one of them, and carries away from the theater, in spite of a confused idea of why certain things were done, a real sense of having intimately known the people who did them. The play is annoyingly near being a piece of genuine literature.

And how good it is to hear the English language well written and equally well spoken in our theater! John Mason is peculiarly fitted for his rôle of the Jewish doctor. Here is a distinguished man of science, and a man of the world as well, who lives in a fine house, wears fine clothes and speaks fine English. He is simple and quiet and authoritative in his manner. He is actuated by the highest ideals of his profession. And he never tries in any way to repudiate his people. Though not an orthodox believer, his whole manner is in keen contrast to the other Jew in the play, who harps on "persecution" and in general is that type we all know only too well of the Hebrew who will not let us forget his race, and who, we feel, is constantly ashamed of it. Mr. Mason brings this finely to the front. We suspect that along these lines Mr. Thomas might most profitably have developed his play. As it is, he has but sketched the possibilities.

Mr. Mason also has the power of clear-cut, fine and sincere speech. His long professional talks to his patients—whom here he is treating mentally—are never mere sermons devised by the playwright. They are actual talks of a physician to a needy patient, delivered with earnest conviction and fraught with significance. The character does not

call for any particular display of emotion. It does call for the suggestion of great intellectual distinction, a fine and tender heart, high professional and racial ideals, and the speech and manner of a gentleman. Mr. Mason fits the rôle. With his long and sound training behind him, he projects the ideal of a character worth knowing and listening to.

Miss Charlotte Ives as the Jew's sprightly and sensible daughter, Mr. Vincent Serrano as her young Christian lover, and especially Miss Chrystal Herne as the Christian wife who revolts from her husband's "double code" and is led back by the old doctor's advice to her, and by his doctrine of the poison of hate preached to her husband, are most notable for persuasive performances in a well-drilled cast. The play is staged in the key of nature and acted with well-bred distinction.

Certainly there is nothing in this latest product of Mr. Thomas, incompletely realized as its good intentions are, to make us regret his new absorption in the "drama of ideas." Never have his people been so human as in his latest play. Never have their acts been so significant to the rest of us. Never has his style been so polished, his dialogue so fraught with the keen-edged wit of his own conversation. Mr. Thomas has come to feel that he has something

to say through the medium of drama. There are those who think what he has to say is not particularly important, though we personally are not of the number. But whether important or not, the fact remains that in trying to say it in terms of stage story he has been driven to pay a deeper attention to the logic of that story, for a stage narrative that pretends to carry a message is a hopeless failure if its logic anywhere breaks down, or if its characters fail to be human and recognizably real.

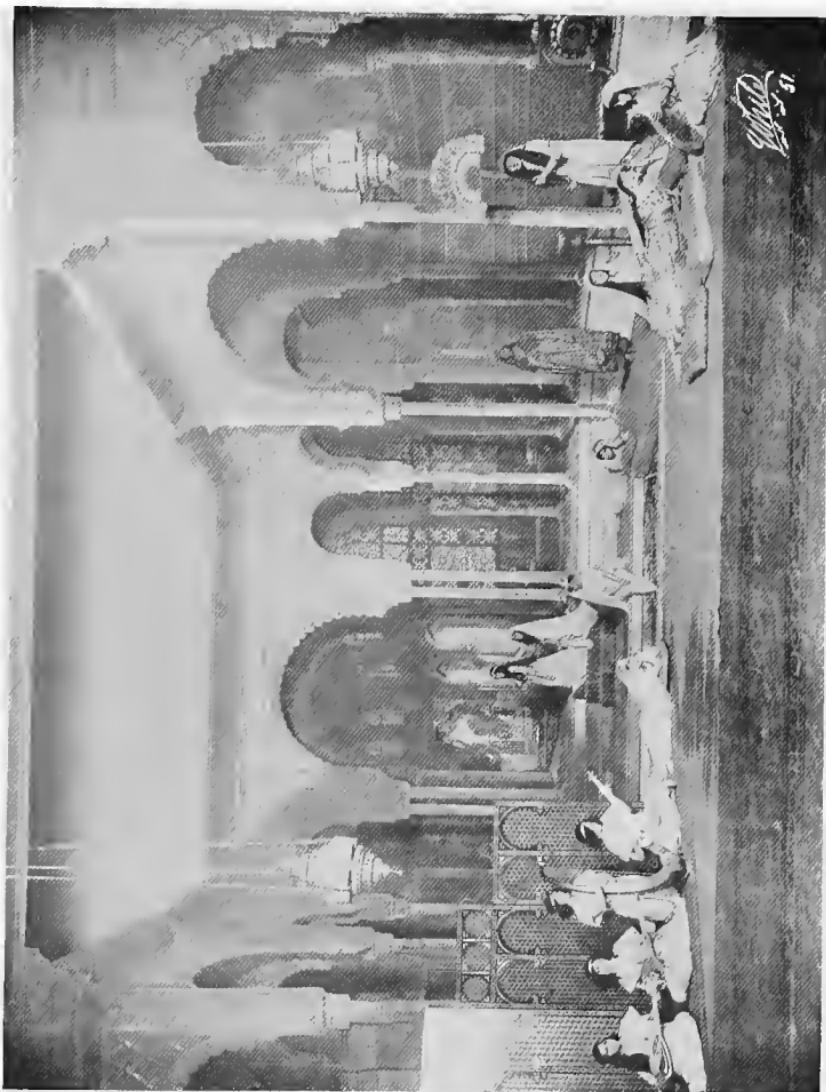
After all, "as a man thinks," so his work will be. We are glad that Augustus Thomas is thinking about interesting and stimulating problems of our contemporary life rather than about the peculiar equipment of this or that star or about "what the public wants." It has made a new man of him and added a new distinction to our drama.

BROADWAY DISCOVERS THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

*“Kismet”—Knickerbocker Theater,
December 25, 1911*

Broadway has discovered “The Arabian Nights.” It is immensely pleased with the discovery. To be sure, Broadway is not entirely certain yet about the new geography. One man at “Kismet” on Christmas night was heard to inquire if Bagdad were in Egypt. He was assured by his companion that it was! Still, there can be no doubt of Broadway’s delight upon first looking into Mr. Knoblauch’s Orient. And that delight will be shared by everybody.

“Kismet,” an “Arabian Night,” as the author calls it, was first mounted in London by that splendid six feet of histrionic vitality, Oscar Ashe. The American production has been made at the Knickerbocker Theater by Harrison Grey Fiske, working with the financial resources of his ancient enemies, Klaw and Erlanger, to back him, and with the some-



KISMET

Harem Scene

thing less than six feet of vitality known as Otis Skinner to give life to the leading character. Mr. Skinner is, in this country, the man of destiny for the part—abounding energy, triumphant clarity of speech, romantic swagger, physical picturesqueness, all are his. For once the right part has come to the right player, the right play to the right producer, and unlimited financial resources have been wisely and well used, not squandered in sham and tinsel. Here's a Christmas present worth while.

And what is "Kismet" like? It is like a tale from the "Arabian Nights"—oddly enough, since that is what it pretends to be! There is something little short of genius in Mr. Knoblauch's inspiration to make it so. We have had plays of the Orient before—and there is "The Garden of Allah" today. But "Kismet" is not of them. Its ten scenes are in the Orient, in the streets and bazaars and harems of Bagdad. Its costumes are the costumes of the Orient. But its "atmosphere" is not realistic. Its spirit is not of today. It is a tale, wild, improbable, barbaric, romantic, full at once of childish simplicity and adult passions, out of the "Arabian Nights." It might have been told by Scheherazade to her lord and master—with only a shade more spice in some of the details had she supplied them!

That is the touch of genius in Mr. Knoblauch's achievement—to dare to write a play in ten scenes, to dare to make it primitive as a folk tale, bloody and passionate and humorous and farther from the present than when old Omar sang before his tent of the modern unrest and doubt, a tale from the childhood of the race. Well, that is to show us, after all, that we still are children who clamor round the story teller's pack.

And what is the story of "Kismet"? Reader, you ask too much. It is nothing about fate, at any rate. There is much told of fate in the "Arabian Nights," but very little actual illustration of it. Things happen very conveniently. Fate is Scheherazade's nimble fancy. So fate in "Kismet" is Mr. Knoblauch's fancy, or, if you like, it is our old friend, the long arm of coincidence. Of course, this is no Sophoclean drama, though now and again Mr. Knoblauch breaks out into rhymed couplets or steals a phrase for a love scene from the Song of Songs in an evident endeavor to tone up his work to a "literary" plane. He doesn't harm its real literary merits thereby, which are deeper seated than the mere garb of language. These merits, as we have stated, are the naïve simplicity and the wild,

romantic, exotic flavor of a tale from the "Arabian Nights."

But what is the tale?

Oh, very well. We'll do our best to enlighten you.

Give ear, O king! to the tale of Hajj the beggar, who dwelt in Bagdad in the first year of the reign of the Caliph Abdallah and begged upon a stone hard by the door of the Mosque of Carpenters, clad in filthy rags. Allah is great!

Now, Hajj, the beggar, had an ancient enemy, the sheik Jawan, who had robbed him of his wife and murdered his son, and when the sheik tossed him (in the first scene) a purse of gold he kept the purse to buy him revenge, though he took good care to spit upon it first.

Then rose Hajj, the beggar, and went unto the market place, to the bazaar of the tailors, to buy him fine raiment. And in the street of the bazaars was much color and riot of tongues, and what with the screams of shopkeepers and the bargaining of buyers, a right brave noise. Then did Hajj, the beggar, set one shopkeeper over against another in quarrel and run away with their cloth stuffs. Allah is good!

Clad therein he entered his own courtyard, where his lovely daughter had been entertaining the Caliph (who loved her, of course) under the impression that he was the gardener's son. And, indeed, her lips were like a thread of scarlet and her speech was comely, and her temples like a piece of pomegranate within her locks, though she was but the daughter of Hajj, the beggar. Allah is great!

And unto her entered Hajj, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchants —which he had stolen.

And entered after him the merchants and the Bagdad police, and took him before the Wazir Mansur, chief of police. Now, police departments were in ancient Bagdad much like those of today. In a word, graft! The Wazir was "in bad" with his accounts, and he wanted the young Caliph out of the way to avoid an investigation. Just as his beautiful limbed ebony sworder was about to chop off Hajj's thieving right hand, the Wazir had an inspiration. He would spare Hajj and marry his daughter, if Hajj would murder the Caliph for him. Now, Hajj loved his right hand. He consented.

So we see Hajj going back to his house in robes more resplendent than ever to break the glad tidings to his lovely daughter. But his lovely daughter

wanted none of the Wazir. She wanted the gardener's son. She was dragged away to greatness protesting violently.

Now do we see the Caliph holding court before the palace, overlooking the towers and minarets of Bagdad, all red and golden in the sun, the sun of Allah's tropic noon. We see the sheik, Hajj's foe, cast temporarily into prison as a suspicious person. Next we see Hajj, as a juggler, come with half-naked dancers from Egypt to amuse the Caliph, who, in all sooth, cares not for the dancers but smells of a rose given to him by Hajj's daughter, herself the Rose of Sharon. Hajj stabs the Caliph—the beggar is good for his bargain. But under these white robes of state the Caliph wears—oh, Allah be praised!—is a shirt of mail. The blow is harmless. Now is poor Hajj cast into a dungeon, deep and dark.

But Allah is good! Therein is his foe, the sheik. Hajj breaks his chains and murders his foe with a triumphant laugh. Then, when the gaoler comes to release the sheik, who is pardoned, it is Hajj who is carried out and the dead body of the sheik the cruel gaoler kicks with his pointed shoe. Allah is all-powerful!

Goes Hajj now by a secret passage he has discov-

ered—praise be to Allah and one of the Wazir's disgruntled wives!—to the Wazir's harem, to rescue his daughter from the man he now realizes will be overthrown and disgraced by the Caliph. We look upon the harem, aye, upon the unveiled inmates pass we masculine judgment. Unveiled? nay, more, two or three undress completely and dive into a pool, like small boys into the swimming hole when a carry-all is heard coming up the road close by. [It may be recalled, to come down to the current year, that in Siam dramatic realism is carried to a similar conclusion, ladies bathing on the stage when no men characters are present, in total oblivion of an audience. Thus do realism and romance touch hands!] We see the Rose of Sharon brought protesting in, and we see the Wazir gloat over her. She is led out to be robed in state for the nuptial as Hajj, none too soon, comes up through a trapdoor in the stage—pardon, through a trap in the floor of the harem, under a real Turkish rug.

Ha, Ha! Hajj discovers that the Wazir is the son of the sheik. He has killed the father. Now for the son! The deed is done. The Wazir is shoved into the pool where the harem inmates late have bathed. Hajj holds him under and counts the diminishing bubbles as they rise. Hamilton Re-

velle, the actor of the Wazir, appears no more upon the scene. Hajj rises from the now bubbleless pool and laughs a mocking laugh. His revenge is completed. Allah is good!

Now comes the Caliph seeking frantically for his Rose of Sharon. He is in good time. He takes her to be his bride, king and beggar maid, romantic pair, starry lovers of fable since kings were, and their places but ill supplied by the millionaires and telephone operators of our latter day degenerate drama!

But Hajj, poor Hajj, is banished from Bagdad, though he be the royal father-in-law. He is to go at sunrise of this night which now closes his one stormy and romantic day of glory and revenge. As the final curtain falls, he has thrown another beggar from his stone before the mosque of carpenters, and clad in his rags once more we see him where we saw him first, and hear him say "Alms, for the love of Allah; for the love of Allah, alms!" And then we hear him snore. The moonlight sleeps on Bagdad's roofs and touches to silver the distant domes and minarets. Hajj has had his day. Tomorrow—

Tomorrow, we go down to Wall Street again.

The one part in this naïve and romantic fable which links its picturesque episodes together and gives it a personal and dramatic interest is that of

Hajj, the beggar, and, of course, Mr. Skinner is amply able to fill the bill, the more as that slight note of unreality in his acting which sometimes mars his impersonations of seriously romantic rôles or rôles in modern plays, here admirably blends with the glamour of dreamlike fable. His impersonation is consistently the beggar, though the part is rather sketched broadly than characterized in detail. Never for an instant is he anything else, be his borrowed robes ever so grand. It is lit with a grim, masculine humor, it is touched with tenderness for his daughter and with fierce passions of revenge. But humor, tenderness, passion, are all held in the key of romantic fable, and so while he counts the bubbles that arise from the drowning Wazir there is no horror in the episode, and when he goes to sleep again at last in his beggar's rags there is no sorrow —only a half smile for the round-the-circle logic of it, and the pleasant finish to a good tale told.

And Mr. Skinner's speech is a perpetual delight. He was trained in the days when the ability to speak well was supposed to be a part of an actor's equipment.

Alas! so much cannot be said for Hamilton Revelle. We suspect those bubbles were in his mouth all along. Fred Eric, as the Caliph, however, spoke

beautifully—if somewhat sentimentally. The costumes, by Percy Anderson of London, were rich, harmonious, beautiful, and we fancy, from Mr. Anderson's past records, probably not incorrect to ancient Oriental life. The scenery was good, the many changes made with astonishing speed and smoothness, the crowds well handled, the "atmosphere" created. Perhaps we might cavil at the entre-act music, which was Oriental chiefly by its monotony.

But why cavil before a feast of so much good fare? "Kismet" is what it claims to be, an Arabian night on the stage. It has done what it set out to do, and having arrived at something long, long ago proved to be potent over the human spirit, its popular success cannot be doubted now. Human nature hasn't so greatly changed since Scheherazade told her tales.

Allah be praised!

CHEWING GUM AND REFORM

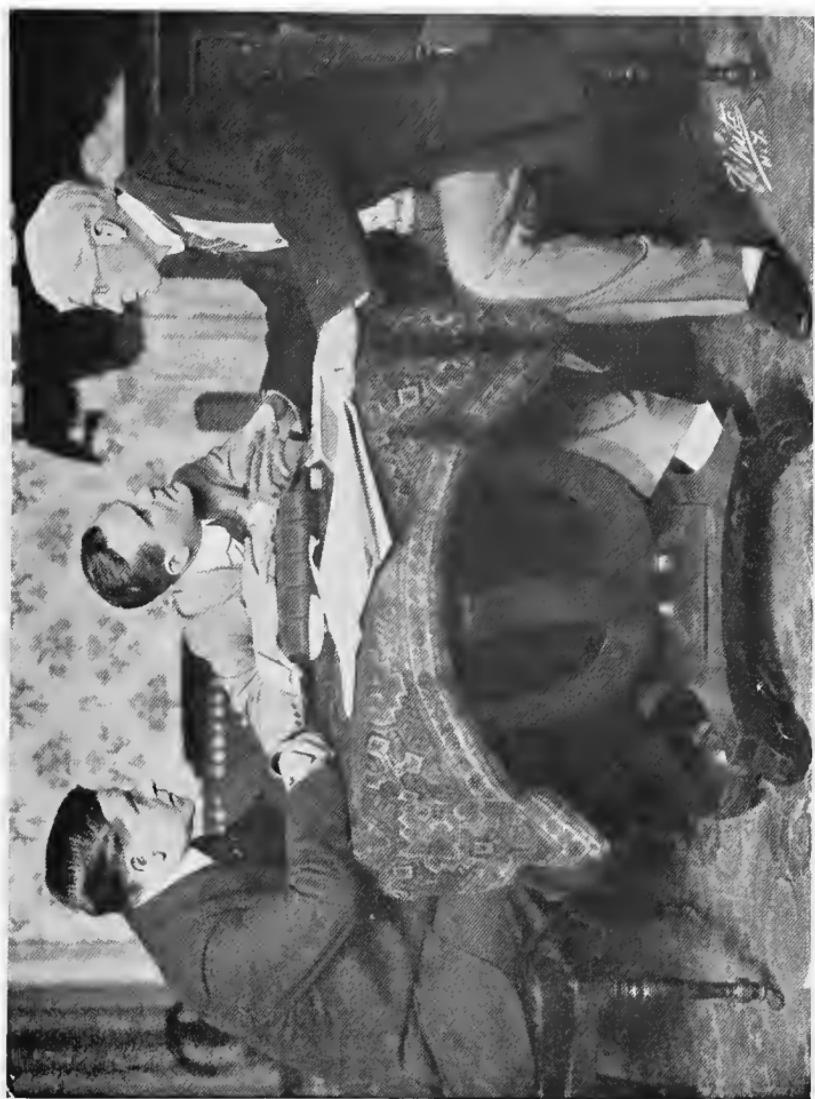
*“Broadway Jones”—George M. Cohan Theater,
September 23, 1912*

The good spirits who hover over babies' cradles bearing gifts were generous with George M. Cohan. They gave him nimble legs, and a knack of whistling up tunes from the vasty void of memory, and considerable comic ability as an actor, and finally the born playwright's gift—which can never be acquired by purchase—of setting upon the stage, in terms of speech and action, exactly the episodes of a story which the audience wishes to see.

More's the pity, then, that the good spirits could not have a little further endowed him with the attributes of good taste and a knowledge of life. If they had he would be deserving of the praise which Arnold Bennett recently heaped upon him. Mr. Bennett admired his works because they were strictly American and “unpretentious.”

That's so like Mr. Bennett!

Of course, what he meant was, that they were



BROADWAY JONES

American because vulgar, or without good taste, and “unpretentious” because simple minded and superficial. Mr. Bennett is typically an insular, middle-class, educated Briton. Hence his unconscious patronage. Who but such a one could praise George M. Cohan by insulting America?

However, this isn’t to be about Arnold Bennett, but Mr. Cohan. Cohan’s latest play, “Broadway Jones,” is now current in New York, and successful, and Mr. Cohan acts the leading part, while his papa and mamma act other parts therein. It is Cohan’s second “straight” play, without music, the first being “Popularity,” which belied its title some years ago. “Get Rich Quick Wallingford” was made from somebody else’s story, so does not count.

In “Broadway Jones” Cohan has deliberately set out to write a comedy with some definite character study in it, and character development, and to act this character himself in a legitimate vein. More remarkable still, he has to a considerable degree succeeded. His success up to a certain point, indeed, is brilliant, and when he fails he fails for exactly these two reasons—his lack of good taste and his lack of a real knowledge of the world.

“Broadway” Jones is a young sport who was born in a “jay” town in Connecticut—all towns which are

not New York being jay towns to Mr. Cohan. There his father ran a chewing gum factory. But young Jones came to Broadway when his father died, leaving his uncle to make the chewing gum, and proceeded to hit the high spots. When the play opens we see "Broadway" coming home in the cold gray dawn to his luxurious apartment, in a condition of alcoholic fuddle which provides a comedy scene with the butler.

Later, when "Broadway" has sobered up, we learn that he is \$50,000 in debt, and has, the night before, engaged himself to a rich widow old enough to be his mother, a horrible creature no less repulsive because she is more or less copied from an actual female well known to the Broadway of reality. There is something so inherently vulgar in the character and the episode that we instinctively lose sympathy with "Broadway" at once. He sinks below the level of comedy. If Mr. Cohan had good taste he would know this.

Scarcely have we seen the widow when the news comes to "Broadway" that his uncle has died, leaving him the chewing gum business, and hard upon this news comes an offer from the chewing gum trust to buy him out for a million. "Broadway"

smashes the furniture in his joy, and flies from the widow to Connecticut.

The rest of the play takes place in the Connecticut village, either in the home of a simple family there or in the chewing gum works. Some of it is farce, some of it is caricature, some of it actually succeeds in being what Mr. Cohan evidently intended—a study in character development—for young Broadway becomes sobered by the situation, realizes that to sell out the business means the ruin of the town, has his family pride and fighting blood aroused, and finally settles down to marry a nice girl and run the gum plant.

The skill with which Mr. Cohan has indicated the humorous effect upon the young rounder of these new ideas of responsibility is capital comedy. Particularly happy is "Broadway's" delight over his first speech to his workmen, so that he goes out and makes another speech every so often. Not only is this well indicated in the play, but it is capitally enacted by the author. Mr. Cohan has dropped his nasal twang. Most of the time he stands up straight. Only occasionally does he try to be humorous with his legs; very frequently he talks like a normal human being, and points his comedy by

legitimate methods. You can laugh at him without being ashamed of yourself, and you can enjoy the genuine touches of character delineation from curtain to curtain.

Yet the play leaves you emotionally quite cold. It never gets below laughter. After all, as Kipling might have said, "What do they know of Broadway who only Broadway know?" Young Jones' slang is very funny and bright. Mr. Cohan's situations follow each other with rapid-fire and sure development. Yet all the time we know in our hearts that any youth who could have sold himself even temporarily for money to such a creature as the Broadway widow here depicted is not lightly to be reformed; that all this midnight "sousing" where the bright lights gleam is a more serious matter than Mr. Cohan realizes; and, finally, that the interjection of a stunted male actor in the part of a fat "boy" who talks what is known as Reub dialect doesn't quite adequately mark the difference between life on Broadway and life in Connecticut.

In other words, Mr. Cohan's play is entirely superficial. It is bright, it has the rapid and sure complexity and development of farce, it is filled with shrewdly caught touches of observation, both of manners and superficial traits of character. But it

is lacking, naturally, in good taste and distinction, and it is lacking in that deeper understanding of men and of life which makes for true comedy and gives reality and emotional glow to the puppets in a play.

But it marks, nevertheless, a considerable step forward for Mr. Cohan. Perhaps, if he should go to a Connecticut village and live there an entire year, never once visiting Broadway during his stay, never once reading a copy of the *Morning Telegraph*, he might write an even better play at the end of the twelfth month. He might. On the other hand, he might be too bored to write anything.

A QUAINT TALE FROM THE ORIENT

*“The Yellow Jacket”—Fulton Theater,
November 4, 1912*

It seems thrice a pity that there is not yet organized in New York a branch of the Drama League, or some kindred organization, which could come to the rescue of “The Yellow Jacket,” now struggling for survival at the Fulton Theater. For here is one of the most interesting, novel and well-mounted plays of the season, suffering the usual fate of the innovator. Yet those who do see it come away delighted. It needs an “organized audience” to give it a helping hand.

“The Yellow Jacket” is not a wasp. It is a real Chinese play, or rather a mosaic of several Chinese plays, adapted by George C. Hazelton and the actor, Benrimo, and staged by the latter. Mr. Benrimo came from the old San Francisco, and he has observed the Chinese Theater for many years. It is said he is more familiar with its methods than almost any other American, at least any American connected

THE YELLOW JACKET



with our stage. We must therefore believe that when he says he has staged "The Yellow Jacket" in the Chinese manner he is telling the truth. Anyhow, he has staged it in a manner totally different from our own, a manner quaint, childlike, naïve—and beautiful. It seems to us authentically Oriental, different, primitive, and we yield to its spell. That is the main thing. If he has also shown us a true picture of Chinese theatrical customs and conventions, so much the better.

We do not pretend to know the names of the original sources of "The Yellow Jacket," nor whether they were works of the Ming dynasty or some other dynasty, whether they are six hundred years old or six. The chances are they antedate Shakespeare, of course. As the play has reached us, it is a simple little story, with allegorical and fantastic embellishments, of mother love and brave-hearted youth triumphant over obstacles, and rewarded at last by the lips of a lady fair. It is a tale old as this old earth.

It seems that Wu Sin Yin, governor of a province, had two wives. The first one had given birth to an infant, Wu Hoo Git, who was regarded as ugly by all save his mother, Chee Moo. Now Wu Sin Yin wished to get her and the brat out of the way

that he might have a beautiful heir by his second wife, so he ordered a farmer to kill her. The farmer, however, killed a flirtatious maid instead, mutilating her features to escape detection, and little Wu Hoo Git was carried off by the farmer and his wife (Chee Moo having died) and raised secretly as their foster child.

When next we see him, Wu Hoo Git has come to man's estate. He is now a beautiful youth, going forth to see the world and conquer back his kingdom from the elegant Wu Fab Din, child of the second wife. Wu Fab Din is called The Daffodil, and he is a Chinese Bunthorne. On his quest of the Yellow Jacket (emblem of his true rank), Wu Hoo Git is accompanied by an aged philosopher, a sort of Chinese Wotan, though less loquacious. He falls into the trap of pleasure and is lured by the maids who sell their love for gold. He crosses high mountains, deep streams, endures snow and cold, meets the thunder god and the great spider, but ultimately he conquers his rival, aided by his mother's spirit looking down from heaven, and by his sweetheart's slipper—his sweetheart, the lovely Plum Blossom.

Now, all this is but a simple, naïve folk tale, played by Saxon actors and actresses dressed up in Chinese robes, yet so quaintly is it presented and so

artlessly sincere have the adapters kept it that we believe it all, even when we smile at it, and more than once it touches our hearts.

The curtain rises on a second curtain, or pair of curtains, embroidered with dragons, and between these curtains comes the Chinese property man, who is supposed to be invisible to the audience. He nonchalantly sucks a cigarette and beats a gong. Props is played by Arthur Shaw, a son of Mary Shaw, and though he does not speak a word during the entire performance, and is supposed to be invisible, his complete indifference to the play and his perfunctory performance of his various duties are irresistibly comic. After Props has beaten his gong Chorus comes forth, impersonated by Signor Perugini. Chorus bows, although admitting it is a little below his dignity, thanks the audience for assembling and bids them, if they find anything amusing in the play, to honorably smile. (Yes, he splits his infinitive.) He does not disclose the authorship of the play, and he is abruptly cut off in his urbanities by Props again with his gong.

Now the curtains part, and we see the stage set as a great, high interior of gold, evidently representing the interior of a Chinese theater. At the back, center, is an alcove where the musicians sit. At the

back, right and left, are two doors for the entrance and exit of characters. The Chorus has a little table in front of the band, where he sits and explains what goes on. Props has a big box and a pile of furniture at one side—all the paraphernalia needed to dress the stage for the various scenes. He has also two or three assistants, whom he kicks about.

Now the first scene is a room in Wu Sin Yin's palace, so Props puts a table in the center of the stage, a stiff black chair on either side of it, and stands behind one of the chairs with a cushion in his hand, scornfully puffing his cigarette. Chorus tells us this is a room in the palace, and Wu Sin Yin enters, walks down the stage and informs the audience who he honorably is. Then he goes to the chair, Props puts the cushion under him, and he sits. As the other characters enter they, too, tell who they are. We speedily learn of Wu Sin Yin's plot to have his first wife and baby killed, and the scene changes to Chee Moo's garden—a change accomplished merely by removing the chairs and table. Chee Moo enters with a piece of wood dressed in a baby dress. The audience, of course, laughs at this, as it has laughed at much before. But she has not spoken three words to this stick of wood before the audience is listening attentively, the stick of wood

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forgotten. After all, it is quite as real as the baby dolls we use to represent infants in arms on our western stage!

When Lee Sin, the farmer, slays Fancy Beauty, the pert maid, instead of Chee Moo, there is another laugh, because he cuts off her head by pulling a red bean bag from under her kimono and holding it aloft. Again, when Chee Moo dies, leaving her babe in a garden, there is a laugh, because Props brings a ladder, leans it against a balcony built over the alcove where the band is stationed, and Chee Moo climbs this to heaven. Yet, as she stands on the balcony looking down upon her stick-of-wood babe once more, you forget to laugh, your imagination catching you up.

Here ends part one of the play, and Chorus comes out, delighted at the applause, and now confesses that he himself wrote the drama and drilled all the players. He honorably bows his thanks.

Part two shows the babe, Wu Hoo Git, grown a fine young man, in the home of the farmer; a handsome youth, full of fire, eager to learn of the world. And he goes forth to learn. Now the false heir to his father's province, the Daffodil, tries to thwart him, and first sends the Purveyor of Hearts, a hunch-back, to tempt him with pleasure. Four little maids

not exactly from school are offered for his inspection, and he buys one, and together they go out on the River of Love. Here Props gets busy. He builds a boat by means of four chairs and a strip of cloth. Two assistant props stand at the stern with poles and pretend to row. One man in the orchestra rubs sand-paper to simulate the swish of waves, and the two young people recline in the craft and float down the stream. At first a snicker goes up from the audience. But George Relph, who plays Wu Hoo Git, is a good actor. So honest, so poetic is his impersonation of this youth just captured by the snare of love, and so honest and quaint is the writing of the scene, that in a moment laughter ceases. Another moment, and that is a boat up there in the moonlight. This, of course, is not alone the Chinese stage. It is the stage of Shakespeare—the platform stage of many a masterpiece; and once more it demonstrates how much of a convention, a custom merely, is the realistic scenery of today.

Wu Hoo Git is soon disillusioned about his little love-girl, and presently falls truly in love with the maiden Plum Blossom. He falls in love with her in a graveyard, where he is seeking for his mother's tomb. Props makes a graveyard by hanging white cloths, covered with inscriptions, over the backs of

chairs, and then standing bored in a corner himself, holding up a bamboo pole to impersonate a weeping willow tree. At the end of this act, of course, Wu Hoo Git learns who he really is, and sets forth to oust the Daffodil.

The Daffodil appears to have been a powerful as well as elegant person. He had command over magic. He is most wonderfully well played by Schuyler Ladd, who smells of flowers held for him by the "invisible" Props with languid grace, and speaks with a diction and clarity rare on our stage. He throws mountains and rivers and snowstorms in his enemy's path. Props makes the mountain out of two tables and four chairs, and Wu Hoo Git and the old philosopher who accompanies him struggle up. Props builds the great river by putting a plank bridge across two chairs. Props makes the snowstorm by scattering a few bits of torn paper. Now, this all sounds like one of Everett Shinn's burlesques, but the smile at Props at once gives way when the actors come on, because they are playing sincerely a sincere story, which captures you out of the ages and the alien lands. As an illustration of the imaginative touches in which this tale abounds we may cite the death of the old philosopher, in the snowstorm. He lies down to die, and Props kicks a red cushion under

his head. Then the actor gets up, leaving his cloak behind, and mounts the ladder to heaven. Wu Hoo Git comes and lifts the cloak on the ground, speaking to the dead "form" beneath it. That simple little piece of primitive stage business has all the stab of spiritual allegory. Of course Wu Hoo Git conquers the Daffodil at last, and banishes him to a garden, there to smell lovely odors forever, and marries his sweetheart, Plum Blossom, as the Yellow Jacket is put about his honorable shoulders.

A word must be said for the music which almost incessantly accompanies this play. William Furst wrote it. It is played on instruments approximating the Chinese, and is made up of Chinese rhythms, square-toed and monotonous. Yet this music never obtrudes, it cleverly avoids monotony, and it consistently heightens the scenes where it is employed. It is another feature of this rich and rare entertainment where perfect taste and artistic discretion and restraint have been successfully employed.

"The Yellow Jacket" is a triumph for everybody concerned—including the Chinese authors of the originals!

BELASCO AND HYPNOTISM

*“The Case of Becky”—Belasco Theater,
October 1, 1912*

In “The Case of Becky,” by Edward Locke, Mr. Belasco has followed the lead he opened in “The Return of Peter Grimm,” and has sought once more to stage something “psychic.” Just as in “The Return of Peter Grimm,” he based his tale on publications of the psychic researchers, here the tale is based quite evidently on the published records of cases of so-called dual personality, particularly, we fancy, on certain cases described by Dr. Morton Prince of Boston. Of course, being Belasco, what he has really sought to do is to give the old tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde a scientific varnish, and an element of novelty, also, supplied by making the hero-villain a girl instead of a man.

The scene is laid in the sanatorium of Dr. Emerson, a noted specialist in psychotherapy. The Doctor’s pet patient is a girl named Dorothy, who is a sweet, lovely maid as Dorothy, but who is constantly

waking up to find herself Becky, a nasty little baggage who hates Dorothy and all her ways. In short, when this heroine is Dorothy she is very, very good, but when she is Becky she is horrid. It seems that hitherto Becky has resisted all efforts of the Doctor—"Old Owl Eyes," she calls him—to hypnotize her, and so to suggest to her that she is dead and can never come back any more. But the time is approaching when the Doctor feels he is going to master her. That is the beginning of the action.

Now, the Doctor has never been able to learn certain facts in his patient's past life, which is rather an odd state of affairs for a famous psychotherapist. He has not discovered that as a child Dorothy was the "subject" of a travelling hypnotist, a professional showman who claimed to be her father, and in that life learned all the evil talk and thoughts which she exhibits as Becky. He does know, however, that many years ago his own wife fell under the influence of a travelling hypnotist, and ran away from him. Does not the plot begin to emerge?

Yes, it is even as you suspect. A travelling hypnotist appears in the first act and he is the man who once led Dorothy round the country and from whom she ran away. He wants her back. He "calls" to her and she comes down the winding stairs. The rest

of the play is a battle for the possession of the girl's mind, as it were, between these two men, doctor and hypnotist. We scent the end from afar. The last act shows the doctor's laboratory at night, a fascinating piece of Belascan realism, with white walls and strange machines, such as the lullaby instrument which croons like the wind and sings on three sweet notes, and the static machine with its crackling, leaping spark, and that curious machine, of which we know not the name, which seems to be composed of a small electric fan blade, brilliantly illuminated, into which the subject looks as it revolves till the hypnotic sleep comes.

It is into this strange room that the doctor lures the hypnotist, conquers him by the aid of the machine, and while he has him in his power learns what he has suspected—that it was he who robbed him of his wife. Of course, he further learns that Dorothy is not the hypnotist's daughter, but his own child. His revenge is strictly scientific. He takes away the showman's powers, thus depriving him of all means of a livelihood, and sends him forth a ruined man.

Science and the dear old sentimental melodrama are curiously jumbled in this essentially improbable fabric. It is sometimes Mr. Belasco's triumph to make us forget the essential triteness of his themes in

the magic of his narration. Here we do not feel that he has succeeded. He has failed, too, in another respect, very strange for him. In a play written to exploit a star, the star's part sinks to a secondary place. This drama is far more a struggle between the two men than it is a tale of Dorothy's dual personality. The good little Dorothy and the bad little Becky are both shown to us, and Miss Starr has a chance to make the change from one to the other before our eyes, as Mansfield did in "*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*." (We cannot truthfully say that it inspired us with quite the same sensations of delicious, shivery horror.) But our interest is far less in her than in the struggle between the two men for possession of her. Miss Starr is the pawn in her own play.

However, that is only Miss Starr's and Mr. Belasco's concern. We are just as ready to enjoy a drama about two men as about one girl. What concerns us is the illusion created, or not created, in the telling. For the present writer, illusion was not created, nor did it appear to be for many in the audience with him. The causes of failure are interesting, and they seemed to lie deeper than the acting, or even the staging. They seemed to be inherent in the material of the play.

In the course of the play, Dr. Emerson explains it was not really the magic drug which turned Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde, but auto-suggestion for which the drug pulled the trigger, as it were. Dr. Jekyll's was really a case of dual personality, a case for the pathologist. So be it, but so long as the case of Dr. Jekyll is kept in the regions of romance and mystery, so long as it is a strange kind of fairy tale, we in the theatre are ready to believe it. It becomes true for us. Reduce it to the scientific terms of pathology and it loses its romance and its wonder, it becomes just an unusual hospital case, so unusual that it fails to appeal to our experiences, and so seems somehow untrue.

Just so "The Case of Becky" seems to us, by trying to establish itself on a purely scientific basis, to acquire that curious unreality which inheres in any fact that is strange and outside our normal experience of daily life. There is much hypnotizing in the play, in full view of the audience. It may all be quite correct scientifically, though we are skeptical on certain points. For instance, after the doctor has put Becky into a hypnotic sleep, she still resists him. But we shall not attempt to set up as an expert in hypnotism. The point is that while an audience knows very well people can be hypnotized, and are

hypnotized every day by the doctors, nevertheless it is something quite foreign to the actual experience of the audience, and hence carries very little emotional conviction. The doctor hypnotizes his rival, and then tells him his power is gone. The rival comes to, gets up, and lo, his power is gone! At least he says it is. Somehow we don't feel a bit sure of it. The whole scene has the curious effect of seeming like a rather easy stage trick to bring about the desired ending of the play. A little hypnotism we can stand upon the stage, but three mortal acts of it are too much. It is neither frankly magic, nor, for most of us, frankly fact. Of course, it is fact, and with our heads we know that it is fact, or that it can be fact. But it does not carry conviction to our hearts in the theatre. That seems to be the real trouble with "*The Case of Becky*," and not the underlying triteness of the story and its straining of coincidence, nor the acting, either. There is still a mystery in death, which made "*Peter Grimm*" a possible stage work for Mr. Belasco. In "*Becky*" we feel he has tackled material which he cannot handle by his pseudo-realistic method. If it were done at all, it would have to be done by a man who cared less about the obvious story, and far more

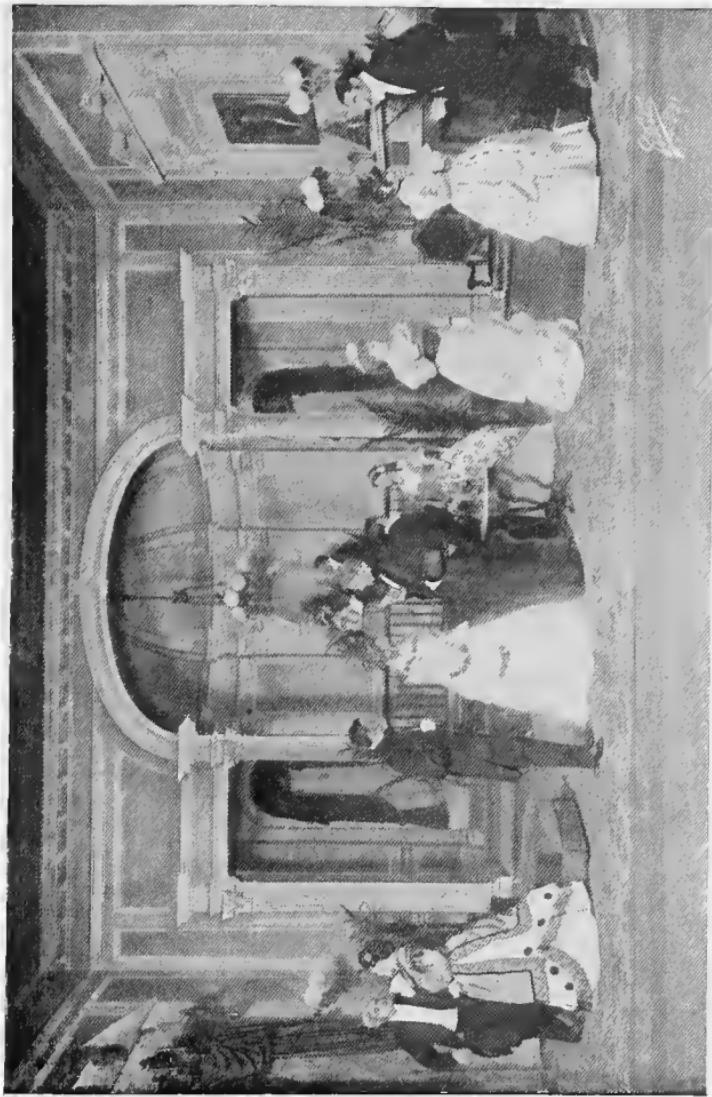
about a real exposition of medical practice. It may be true that Dr. Jekyll was merely the victim of auto-suggestion, but after seeing "The Case of Becky" we still prefer to believe in the drug.

WHAT BISHOPS DO IN THEIR YOUTH

*“Romance”—Maxine Elliott Theater, February 10,
1913*

In many respects Edward Sheldon's new play, “Romance,” marks a distinct technical advance over his previous work. This drama, now visible at Maxine Elliott's Theater, with Miss Doris Keane in the leading woman's part, achieves, for one thing, a consistent and unfailing atmosphere, or perhaps it would be better to say mood. It is keyed to a certain emotional note, and it does not slump at any time into the merely sensational.

To be sure, some of the players, and more particularly one player, Mr. William Courtenay, do their best to make it sensational, to drop it to quite another level. But we must do the play the credit of laying the blame in this case on the actors. In the second place, Mr. Sheldon has here, it seems to us, come nearer to consistent, plausible, and really human characterization than in any work he has so far written. By human characterization we mean char-



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Act I

acterization felt by him, not merely reasoned out; and so made more emotionally appealing and real to an audience. We were never sure in "Salvation Nell," for instance, how much we should have cared about, or even believed in, Nell, had any actress but Mrs. Fiske played her; and we felt the same way toward Mary Page of "The High Road."

They are real people, humanly felt, in "Romance," and they behave according to their natures.

On the other hand, here, as occasionally elsewhere, Mr. Sheldon has been too careless in his appropriation of situations in past dramas to his own uses. He has the excellent precedent of Homer and Shakespeare, not to mention lesser lights; and doubtless the deed is more or less to be judged by the success with which the dramatist brings it off, bends the old material to his own purposes. We do not question for a moment Mr. Sheldon's success here in revamping the atmosphere of Fitch's "Captain Jinks" to the new drama of "Romance." His play is in no sense Fitch's play. The woman is differently studied—and far more deeply studied. The whole tone of the drama, its "message," if we may hazard the word, is different. It is all unmistakably Sheldon. Yet the fact remains that the heroine is an opera singer in the palmy days of Mapleson and the old

Brevoort House, that this same old Brevoort House furnishes one of the sets, and there is a distinct duplication of superficial atmosphere. Some people have complained that Mr. Sheldon used devices in "The High Road" which were used in "The Earth." Many more have complained of this duplication of Fitch's drama in "Romance." It would pay Mr. Sheldon to be a little more careful, for complaints of this sort may easily become nasty. He is not one that needs to lean on anybody for his inventions.

But to the story.

"Romance" begins with a prologue and ends with an epilogue, and the intervening three acts drop back forty years in time, so that they come with the misty glamour of a tale that is told. The characters in the prologue are old Bishop Armstrong and his grandchildren, Suzette and Harry. Harry, it seems, is engaged to an actress. He and his sister break the news to the old man. She appears to be a real actress, not a lady from the chorus. The only charge against her is her profession.

It is night. By the light of the fire the old bishop answers his impetuous grandson's plaint that he, the bishop, can hardly know what such a passion means to youth. And the tale that he begins in the fire-light glow is a tale from his youth. In dark-

ness the curtain falls, and rises soon—but not soon enough completely to sustain the illusion—on a room in Cornelius Van Tuyl's house, at 58 Fifth avenue, on a November evening forty years ago.

That is where the real play begins—the bishop's story to his grandson is enacted before our eyes.

We find the bishop the ardent young rector of St. Giles'. Mr. Van Tuyl, who is giving a ball, is his leading vestryman. We are in the polite society of the seventies, which George William Curtis poked amiable fun at. A great Italian singer is to come to the ball that night, Mme. Cavallini. There has been much talk of her past, some of which the rector hears. He is shocked—and piqued.

She comes. But when the rector meets her he does not know who she is, and she has fun with him; he is a strange type to her, this innocent Puritan, and she to him. But through the scene of gay banter on her part and bewilderment on his is apparent a rising mutual attraction. The rector does not learn who his charmer is till later, when a voice in the room below arrests him, and looking over the rail he beholds this same woman singing "Know'st Thou the Land?" from "Mignon"—the air the bishop's granddaughter in the prologue had wished to put into the victrola, "as sung by Geraldine Far-

rar." The old air comes up the stairs, from the imagined glow of the ballroom below; the rector stands gazing, his heart entangled in romance; and the first curtain falls.

The next act is laid in the rector's study, and we learn what his aunt thinks of his "carryings-on" with this opera singer, we see him make love to her, propose marriage, we realize that she loves him, and then the act tightens into sterner drama when to the rector comes the inevitable revelation which we, in the audience, have been expecting—namely, that Cavallini has been the mistress of Van Tuyl. Poor little creature, taken up early into a strange and dangerous life by the gift of her voice, out of a life perhaps more strange and dangerous still, her love for the rector is the best thing she has ever known. To tell him of her past shame is the bravest thing she ever did. Our sympathy goes out to both of them.

The last act is the evening of the same day. Cavallini has sung her farewell performance and is being brought back to the Brevoort House in a coach drawn by admirers, to a room full of flowers. But she is sad of heart; her gayety is gone. Comes suddenly the rector, evidently fired by a mad, evangelical passion to save her soul. There is a stormy

scene, ending in the rector's change of purpose, fired by jealousy and desire, to an equally mad passion to run off with her at once. But her love for this good man has done its work. Cavallini repels him. With a fine, pathetic dignity, she tells him that to refuse him is the best atonement she can make. He goes out humbled, never to see her again. She, like the queen, goes away "to sin no more."

Then once more we see the bishop sitting before the fire, and his grandson rising, now the tale is told. He pats his grandfather affectionately on the back. Where is he going? He is going to the theatre to get his heart's desire. They are not going to wait any longer!

The old man smiles. It is Youth!

Possibly for some people the fact that there seems to be no particular moral analogy between the bishop's story and his grandson's affair will weaken the coherence of the whole drama. But the grandson is a nice boy, and we prefer it as it is. Certainly the main story has coherence, charm, force and a real touch of romantic glamour, and it provides a very fine acting part for Miss Doris Keane.

Cavallini is wayward, capricious, alternate smiles and moodiness, bright and alluring, full of gay fun, and full, too, of the sadness which comes from our

reflection on her pathetically predestined past. She is a child of the streets and the opera, with all the glamour and the strangeness of the great artist who rises from such obscurity through such devious, unknown ways. So Miss Keane plays her, with a bewitching accent, with infectious fun, with delicious capriciousness, with true tenderness, too. It is only when the last act is reached, and Cavallini rises to the pathetic dignity of redemption and renunciation that Miss Keane falls short of the mark. Here the note is beyond her. Here Mr. Sheldon is writing for Mrs. Fiske's capacities, perhaps unconsciously, not for Miss Keane's. But it must also be confessed that Miss Keane receives too little aid from William Courtenay, as the rector.

Mr. Courtenay, of course, plays first the bishop in the prologue. Here the modern training (or better the lack of training) of our actors is painfully apparent. Dressed up as an old man, Mr. Courtenay, who has so long "played himself," is lost. His speech becomes stilted. He talks in a kind of sing-song. He has no more of a mellow old bishop's dignity and sweetness than the chair he sits in. To be sure, the part is hardly written with the mellowness an older playwright could have given it, such mellowness as Mr. Thomas gave to his two judges

in "The Witching Hour." But Mr. Courtenay does not help. The prologue falls short of its possible effect.

As the rector, Mr. Courtenay is more on his own ground—for a time, at least. He escapes a too easy priggishness, and so long as Mr. Sheldon gives him no speeches which rise above an ordinary conversational diction he talks quite naturally. When, however, the language is heightened to meet a mood (and the author is striving with each new play for a richer speech, and succeeding here, certainly, more than in "The High Road" in escaping the pitfalls of mere rhetoric) Mr. Courtenay becomes once more sing-song and artificial.

His worst failure, however, is in the third act. Here he simply lets go of the character altogether, and rants all over the Hotel Brevoort. He becomes first a Sam Jones in his effort to save Cavallini's soul, and then a Caliban in his passion for her body. We cannot think that Mr. Sheldon intended anything so raw. Certainly the scene could be played in character and in keeping with the romantic dignity and charm of the rest of the play. We lose altogether in such playing the spiritual note on which the story proper should end.

In striking contrast to Mr. Courtenay's undis-

ciplined exhibition is the acting of A. E. Anson as Van Tuyl, a gem of a performance that actually persuades us for the time into accepting this fine gentleman, this pillar of St. Giles', at his face value, and attributing his past relations with Cavallini to that same extenuating glamour of romance which all of us in our heart of hearts look upon with sympathy. Yes, we make the confession boldly—not the confession, the charge! Mr. Anson's complete command of the resources of his art is a treat to all lovers of acting, and his suave ease upon the stage a thing to be copied by many a player.

It only remains to add that George Foster Platt has staged "Romance" with his usual skill in surface illusion, and given us that gratifying sense of every smallest thing done right.

ADVENTURES OF A SOUL AT THE WINTER GARDEN

*“The Honeymoon Express”—Winter Garden,
February 6, 1913*

If we accept Anatole France's definition of criticism as “the adventures of a soul among masterpieces,” how is one to write criticism about a new production at the Winter Garden? Henry W. Savage has been having a fine time recently jumping upon the critics. He complains that some of them exploit themselves rather than the play they are writing about. Yet occasionally that is not only the inevitable, but the kindest proceeding. When you send your soul adventuring, not among masterpieces, but inanities, you prefer to talk about the protective tariff or Bergson's metaphysical theories, or even your own, rather than to discuss the experiences through which you have just passed.

Walter Pater saw the *Mona Lisa*—how fortunate he lived before that lady was stolen!—and his soul's adventure was recorded in one of the most languidly

lovely passages in all the glorious procession of English prose. But it is doubtful if even Pater could have created criticism which was also literature had he been seeing a chromo-lithograph on a soap calendar. Yet even your poor overworked newspaper dramatic critic wants to write something as near literature as his powers will permit, and he longs with a more selfish passion, perhaps, but hardly a less intense, than that of the Drama Leaguers, for masterpieces. He has a soul—yes, even the dramatic critic has a soul; and when it can go adventuring, whether at “Romeo and Juliet” or “Pinafore,” whether at “She Stoops to Conquer” or “Hindle Wakes,” the critic then has the materials out of which he can himself create something which by the grace of God may be not unworthy of print.

But when the critic has to check his soul in the cloakroom and goes in to see not a masterpiece but an inanity, he has no materials of adventure to work with and if he then comes away and tries to make bricks without straw, tries to create something at least readable by Charles Lamb’s method of chatting about himself, of *causerie*, after all he is not so much to be blamed. It is sometimes not vanity but literary idealism which drives him to it.

If he himself, besides, were not more worth writ-

ing about than many of the “shows” he witnesses, he would be totally unfitted for the post of critic. You can hardly expect him to be so modest as not to know that.

All of which is by way of informing the perspicacious reader that we found Gaby Deslys in “The Honeymoon Express” at the Winter Garden in New York a most desolate and deplorable form of entertainment, in which view some thousands of well-fed and over-dressed Broadwayites of both sexes do not in the least concur.

For the opening night, speculators—who have been abolished in New York, by the way—were asking, and getting, as high as \$6.00 a seat. We had planned to go and see “Joseph and His Brethren,” but we could not resist our impulse to see why people would give up six good dollars to watch and listen to Gaby Deslys.

Nor do we know any better now.

The great auditorium of the Winter Garden, a converted horse exchange, was crowded to the doors with men, women and tobacco smoke. People even stood six deep at the rear. It was not the kind of an audience you see at “Peter Pan.” It was a very sophisticated audience. It had on its best clothes. Some of the feminine head-dresses were remarkable.

Indeed, when the wearers had taken their seats, most of their dressing seemed to be on their heads. There was expectancy as well as cigar smoke in the air. Something was going to be doing, without doubt.

The something turned out to be "*The Honeymoon Express*," described as "a spectacular farce with music, in two acts and six scenes." We detected some farce, but a patient wait of nearly three hours failed to disclose any music, though a large orchestra was industriously at work most of the time manufacturing syncopated sounds. Melville Ellis played the piano, and numerous people frequently opened their mouths and emitted strange noises.

The whole affair was staged by Ned Wayburn. As a result, nobody stood still for a second. The choruses rushed back and forth in time to the syncopated noises, waved their arms, skipped, made lines across the stage, and went off each with her hands on the hips of the girl in front, kicking up the leg toward the audience. The principals shouted and rushed about. The din and the meaningless movement were incessant, till the brain was beaten into a kind of quiescent stupor.

And through it all Gaby glided in about twelve remarkable gowns and one perfectly good set of em-

broidered French underwear. Every time she entered the stage she wore a new dress, and in the second act she took her dress off and put on a night-gown. Occasionally she essayed to sing, and frequently she danced in a kind of wild, clumsy abandon. Then there was a black-faced comedian named Al Jolson who interrupted the proceedings at periodic intervals to regale the audience with somewhat dubious witticisms and strange songs supposed on Broadway to be negro. Through the hub-bub a brave little plot struggled for existence, and won admiration more for its courage than its refinement.

Yet, in spite of the best efforts of the industrious Gaby, in spite of Al Jolson's reputation and Melville Ellis's costumes, in spite of the "augmented orchestra" and the ragtime of Jean Schwartz, the final glory went to the scenery and the electrician, aided, of course, by the brave little plot.

Gaby's husband was off to Paris to get a divorce. Gaby missed the train. A motor was called into service that she might catch another train, the **Honeymoon Express**, at Rouen Junction, sixty miles away, and forestall his action. Moving pictures of the real players, in a real motor, were first thrown on the screen, to show the start for Rouen, up Pel-

ham Parkway, the Bronx, New York. Then the curtain rose on Rouen Junction, with the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc on the back drop. The stage was nearly dark, the mountains dim.

Suddenly we saw the lights of the train crawling, winding, down the mountains, like a golden caterpillar. A moment, and the tiny headlights of a motor appeared. It was a race between them! A race on the scenery! The audience bubbled with delight. The lights of the train grew larger and nearer, the lights of the motor larger and farther spaced. Finally the stage was darkened completely, we heard the train, we heard the motor. The engine headlight streamed out into the auditorium; so did the twin lamps of the motor, growing larger rapidly, and wider apart. With a cough and a roar, a real motor dashed upon the stage out of the dark, side by side with a big locomotive, not so real. Out leapt Gaby—just in time. The whole race was conducted with great mechanical ingenuity and was greeted with cheers.

Then the electrician went cheerfully home. Gaby put on a new dress, and the “augmented orchestra” once more went at their sweaty task of sawing ragtime.

Now, if Colonel Savage had produced this con-

traption (which, by the way, he would never have done), he would doubtless object in his tactful way to this alleged criticism of it, as being quite unfair. If we were fair according to managerial standards, we should say that a huge audience enjoyed it, that it is likely to have a long run, that the gorgeous costumes cost a heap of money, that Al Jolson elicited roars of laughter, and so forth, ad nauseam.

But, if we may be permitted to say so, we are not concerned with the length of its run, nor with the cost of its costumes, nor with the attitude toward it of the kind of people who like that kind of thing. We are not concerned with anybody's attitude toward it save our own. There was a time, perhaps, in our hopeful youth, when we thought that it was our duty to make other people feel as we did, and even held them in some contempt if they didn't. But that time has passed. We have grown weary of effort and weary of contempt. If anybody likes "*The Honeymoon Express*," finding it amusing and stimulating, why, we rejoice now that it exists for him to see and hear.

But we still reserve the inalienable right to state that we personally got nothing out of it except a headache.

HOLDING THE MIRROR UP TO ART

*“The Show Shop”—Hudson Theater,
December 15, 1914*

“The Show Shop,” by James Forbes, author of “The Chorus Lady,” “The Traveling Salesman” and other comedies, has been produced at the Hudson Theatre, where for many years Mr. Forbes was the press agent, and it is pleasant to report that it is not only the best play Mr. Forbes has yet written, but one of the cleverest, brightest, most satisfying plays displayed on Broadway this season. In fact, it is so good that it almost restores a lagging faith in the American theatre. It is acted as well as it is written, and the whole production might come from Vienna without a blush.

“The Show Shop” is somewhat difficult to classify. It constantly skates the line between satiric comedy and burlesque, never in its burlesque losing sight, however, of its legitimate story, yet never in the telling of that story forgetting its burlesque purpose. At once too kindly and too farcical to be called an



THE SHOW SHOP

Act III

out-and-out satire of theatrical life, it constantly pokes such delicious fun at this life that it cannot be classed with Pinero's "Trelawney of the Wells," where a romantic element after all prevailed. Moreover, "The Show Shop" is complicated by a novel act containing a play within the play, cleverly woven into the story. In Mr. Forbes' other comedies he has tried to pass from the comic to the serious (as in "The Chorus Lady") and achieved only crude sentimentality. His transitions were like those of a poor singer from one register to another. But in this latest work he has tried for no changes of mood, cutting his work all of a piece, writing it all in the same spirit of kindly burlesque, and the result is happy artistic unity. For once we have an American play, so American that it would almost call for a glossary, which we could yet show to a cultivated European without a single blush of apology.

The first act is laid in a theatrical manager's office in New York, the second act in a cheap hotel on the road (in Punxatawney), the third act on the stage of a New York theater and the last act in the rooms of the hero. The hero is the only person in the play who isn't professionally connected with the theatrical game, and he is dragged into it in Act I. He is a rich young fellow, dreadfully in love with Bet-

tina Dean, who is a sweet little actress with a really-truly mother, who also was an actress once, and who won't let Bettina marry Jerome Belden (the hero) till her child has made her debut on Broadway and had a fling at a "career." Max Rosenbaum, the manager, is about to send Bettina out in a play called "The Punch," and Jerome, in order to be near her, signs up to play the part of a youth about town. Of course, he knows nothing about acting, but he "looks the part," he is the "type," so the manager engages him at once. In the second act we see the manager and his company on the road, after the play has failed, the manager telling these footlight children in words that are said to be reminiscent of a certain Broadway dramatic Napoleon, the sad news. Of course, Jerome is much cut up, because if the play doesn't come into New York his chance of marrying Bettina is just so much longer put off. Therefore he suggests to Max that he will put up the money for a new production, and further guarantee Max \$5,000 if the play fails, which is, of course, what he wants it to do.

"I don't believe I could pick a failure," says the manager.

But Jerome, the amateur, is confident that he can, so he puts a dozen mss. on the table, shuts his eyes

and counts them out, eeny, meeny, miny, mo. The ms. called "A Drop of Poison" is "it." Mother Dean, when she hears that Max is to star her daughter in it (of course, she doesn't know of the real plan), promptly changes the name to "Dora's Dilemma," because she says the name of the star character should always appear in the title.

The girl, however, positively refuses to act in the play unless Jerome is her leading man. She will not make love to anybody else, even on the stage, so poor Jerome, who has had all the acting he wants, is forced into this job.

The third act shows first the dress rehearsal of "Dora's Dilemma," of the big climax, where Jerome is supposed to have a fight in the dark with a policeman, with incriminating papers in his pocket. He is supposed to take his coat off, however, so the heroine can get the papers, and when the lights are switched on she holds the papers in her hand and cries, "I am the thief." This rehearsal is one long scream for the audience, even for persons who have never seen a real rehearsal. Douglas Fairbanks, who plays the hero, is of course supposed to act very badly, and he does, to the queen's taste. The poor author figures chiefly by moaning and wailing, as his play is slaughtered. The stage manager

fumes. Mother Dean interferes. Max, the little Jew manager, acts the diplomat. All the players exhibit vanities, and the chaos of the whole affair is very comically rendered. Perhaps the best comedy of all is the rehearsal of the curtain calls. Then the curtain falls for a moment, and rises again to show the actual performance that night.

For this scene Max sits in a real box in the actual theater, with Mother Dean. All goes well till the hero enters. Then he forgets everything, forgets to take his coat off, has the fight in the dark, and when the lights come on, lo, the poor heroine has no papers to hold up, the play is ruined! No, for Jerome has an inspiration! He climbs up over the desk, he falls on the policeman, he really knocks him down, he bowls out the other characters, none of whom has been rehearsed for this impromptu climax, he seizes the heroine in his arms, and exits with her through the window, amid the applause of the astonished audience.

The last act takes place the next morning. Bettina comes to Jerome's rooms, weeping. Hasn't he seen the papers? The play is a hit! The unexpected climax is praised. Jerome is praised for his unconventional acting, his freedom from the usual routine technique.

“What is technique?” the bewildered youth asks.

“Technique,” replies the actress, “is something you work all your life to get, and the public doesn’t want.”

At first Bettina and Jerome refuse to go on with the play, insisting that they are going to get married at once. Of course, Max has a terrible moment at this threat. They mustn’t marry—the public wouldn’t come to see either of them then! They must not stop playing, either, because then all the company would be out of work. The thought of the really nice people in the company decides Jerome. He will go on with the agony the season out—and then for Europe or a farm. But he insists on a secret wedding, none the less, and immediately. He and Bettina are leaving for the Little Church Around the Corner as the curtain falls.

This bare outline will show the satirical scheme of the play, the clever burlesque of the hit-and-miss of theatrical production. It can not, however, even suggest the constant snap and sparkle of the shop slang; the keen bits of character observation; the amiable fun poked at managers, actors, authors and even audiences. For once an author has had a first rate idea, and clothed it in first rate garments of dialogue and character. It is acted, too, in the same

spirit. Douglas Fairbanks is the "star," on the program, but in reality he is merely one of a well balanced company. From Miss Edna Aug, who gives a delicious performance as the manager's fresh stenographer in Act I, to William Sampson, who plays an old-time actor in love with his old-time wife, played by Olive May, every player is capital. It is, to be sure, a play of character parts, and such parts can always be better filled in America than "straight" parts. One of the very best performances is given by an actor named George Sidney. We are told that for years he has played nothing but Jew character rôles in such cheap burlesques as "Busy Izzy," but here, as the little Jew manager, there is nothing to suggest such a bad training. He looks exactly like a composite picture of Abe Erlanger and Charles Frohman, and he acts with a quiet skill and an unforced feeling for comedy which is a delight. The part does not call for any of Mr. Erlanger's prize fighter moods, but does call for much of Mr. Frohman's sweet kindness. An ignorant little vulgarian, with a good heart and the soul of a gambler—that is Max, and that is how Mr. Sidney plays him. Ned Sparks, also, as the lank, weary, nasal stage manager, is marvelously true to life. Play and performance are alike capital,

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both jolly entertainment and, beneath the fooling, good-natured but really keen and intelligent satire. You don't have to check either your brains or your taste in the coatroom when you go to see "The Show Shop."

MR. COHAN'S BELIEF IN MIRACLES

*"The Miracle Man"—Astor Theater,
September 21, 1914*

George Cohan has dramatized a book by Frank L. Packard, called "The Miracle Man," and by so doing he has, as it were, thrown down the gauntlet to more serious criticism. He has endeavored to write a play of spiritual forces, a drama in which the protagonist is Faith. No doubt he has also supplied the hope, and trusts to his audiences for the charity. But, truth to tell, Mr. Cohan is over his depth. We have not read the book from which his play takes its theme and title, but we shrewdly suspect that the author of that book was over his depth also.

The play is not the first attempt to make a drama out of the phenomena of faith healing. A similar attempt was made by the late William Vaughn Moody, and Henry Miller endeavored to persuade Forbes Robertson to act "The Faith Healer," Mr. Moody's drama. Failing that, Mr. Miller himself acted it for a single performance at Harvard Uni-

versity. "The Faith Healer" was the work of a poet, and of a man who thought deeply and felt profoundly. Yet it was not successful on the stage. Not long before, Henry Arthur Jones had produced a play called "The Evangelist," which was not, to be sure, a drama of faith healing, but which depended upon the analogous phenomenon of conversion—which is faith healing of the spirit instead of the body. That play also failed.

Into the probable reasons for such failures there is scarcely time nor space to go now. It is sufficient to say that the phenomena depicted, especially the phenomenon of bodily healing, lie so far beyond the experience of the ordinary person today that they can with difficulty carry emotional conviction. In a credulous age faith healing might have been as readily accepted by every one as witchcraft was in Salem, or ghosts in Shakespeare. But not so today. In most alleged cases now you and I instinctively feel that an element of fraud probably enters; and in all cases where a genuine cure appears to have been effected we demand an inquiry as to the nature of the disease, whether functional or organic, and we are led from our contemplation not to blind "faith" but rather into a still more curious and scientific investigation of the mysterious connection

between the brain and the rest of the body. "Miracles" once built shrines. Now they build psychotherapeutic laboratories. Even in the case of "conversion," what was once a common experience of nearly every Protestant believer is now to a very great extent something we must go to the Salvation Army rescue missions to observe first hand.

But these considerations have not troubled Mr. Cohan, or not enough to deter him from his attempt to make a play out of "The Miracle Man." We are glad that they didn't, for the main idea of the story and, of course, of the play, is a striking one; and because Mr. Cohan has far too much good sense and theatrical taste not to handle it seriously the public has a chance to see him in a new rôle. If the play enjoys a moderate degree of prosperity—and that seems probable—Cohan's place as a man of serious ambitions will be more firmly fixed, and it will be easier for him to make his next advance forward. Moreover, every time he handles a theme with spiritual values in it he unquestionably must react to these values, for he is an Irishman. He must broaden his personal outlook. We are glad he had the courage to step over his head into this deep water.

Here is the scheme of "The Miracle Man." An

old fellow called the patriarch lives in a small Maine village, and effects cures, or so the whole village believes. A sharper from New York sees in him a chance to make money. Though the patriarch will take no fees, he would take money for the sake of his grand-niece, his only relative, if she could be found. The sharper pretends himself to be cured of his "vocal troubles." Next he steals enough evidence to palm off his "queen" successfully as the old man's lost niece. Next he brings up two other crooks from New York, one a professional "flopper," who pretends to be a cripple, and the other a "dope fiend," who pretends a terrible cough. The scheme is to have these cases cured, to publish the fact to the world, and then to fatten on the fees which will come in, for the old man will turn all the money over to his "niece."

All goes well for a time, but the sharper reckoned without the old man's genuine power. Gradually the girl falls under the spell of his benignity, the dope fiend falls in love with a country girl in an honest way, and finally, when the flopper is cured of his pretended malady, a small boy, who is a real cripple, is cured also, and even the flopper collapses at this. With his two male pals converted into honest citizens, and his "queen" on the verge, the sharper

is hard put to hold his own. Finally the girl refuses point blank to have anything more to do with him unless he reforms also, and between her attitude and the death of the patriarch even he is finally converted, and the last curtain falls on a picture of wholesale regeneration.

It is, assuredly, a pretty big pill to swallow, this story. In the first place, it is hard to fancy these impostors being able to carry off their bluff, especially in the case of the girl. A crook's mistress is usually not the sort who can go into a rural community and successfully pose as a pattern of virginal sweetness and modesty. Mr. Cohan here, as usual, oddly underestimates the intelligence of all those benighted souls who do not dwell on Manhattan Island. In the second place, the character of the miracles is so vaguely indicated, the nature of the old man's philosophy so shadowy, that he tends to become a mere *deus ex machina*, a theatrical device, not a breathing, living force of mind and spirit. Finally, this sudden and complete conversion of four crooks from wickedness not only to honesty but to a desire for a bucolic existence with rural spouses in a Maine village is indeed a miracle, when all that they have done is to look upon a sweet old man with white whiskers and see a cripple walk. Of course,

great things have taken place within their souls—nothing less than complete revolution, in fact. But Mr. Cohan has neither the technique to portray that inner revolution nor the knowledge, perhaps, to understand it. We see merely the unconvincing externals of the conversion. The real meat of it escapes entirely—and would, indeed, escape almost any dramatist, for it is well nigh impossible to dramatize a soul-state.

Of course, it may be urged that such people as these crooks are the very ones most susceptible to the forces which make for a complete conversion, and we readily grant it. We, too, have read "Twice Born Men." And we even knew it before that book appeared. It is also a fact that truth is stranger than fiction; but a great many stories, which are justified by being based on fact, are none the less quite unconvincing in an art form. The truths told of in "Twice Born Men" are stranger than the fictions of "The Miracle Man"; everything in Cohan's play might have a basis of fact; but it wouldn't be a bit more convincing as an art product. In art form a story must not only be true, it must seem true, it must let us see the processes going on within the characters at all times, so that we can understand and be convinced. This task is too much for Mr.

Cohan. He has neither the skill nor the necessary knowledge of the human soul. The nearest he comes to it is in the case of the "queen," because her conversion is less a matter of "faith" (and just what Mr. Cohan means by faith he seems to have only the vaguest idea) than of the sweet influences of a quiet home and a gentle, loving old man, whom she grows to respect and love. Such influences are understandable to author and audience alike.

The present writer has been accused of attacking Mr. Cohan unkindly. He hopes he has done nothing of the kind. Nobody can be blind to Mr. Cohan's exceptional merits and abilities. Whatever he does—acting, writing, staging—he does efficiently, remarkably efficiently, up to a certain point. He knows most of the tricks of the trade, he knows what the public likes, he knows how to pick actors, he knows how to keep a story moving briskly, plausibly; he knows how to write farce better than anybody else in America. But one thing he does not know—the human soul. His plays have never yet gone below the surface of emotion, they have never probed human conduct, whether seriously or comically, they have never reached the level of dramatic literature, any more than the plays of Dion

Boucicault did, who in his generation was as prolific and successful as Mr. Cohan.

While we are hailing Cohan as the "leader" of our stage, because he gives us so many successful entertainments, aren't we by way of forgetting that leaders are made of sterner stuff than this? Because "The Miracle Man" so well illustrates Cohan's failures as a dramatist, as well as some of his conspicuous merits (for the story is told, on the objective side, with genuine narrative art), it is worthy of this considerable consideration, though as literature it is nil. It also illustrates his ambitions—and for that reason we hope it succeeds. The ambition is honorable and may lead to better things.

The chief part in "The Miracle Man" is adroitly played by George Nash. Miss Gail Kane is the "queen." She would be more effective if she had not assiduously cultivated a round shouldered stoop and forward thrust of the head which perilously suggests a giraffe.

A VICTORY OF UNPRETENTIOUSNESS

*“Too Many Cooks”—39th Street Theater,
February 25, 1914*

It is always a tendency of drama to run to extremes, to strong contrasts. If it seeks romance, it seeks it in China or Persia, in the Ireland of a century ago, in the mythical kingdom of Zenda. In these latter years it seeks sex problems in the brothel. Striving to be lowly or bucolic, it turns to Sag Harbor or the state of Maine. Any city life portrayed must be New York City life, with a strong emphasis laid on the terrible business strain undergone by the men and the terrible temptations to extravagance resisted in vain by the women. There is no play about Atlanta, Ga., or Indianapolis, Ind., and, we were going to say, Pawtucket, R. I.—though Gus Thomas did write “The Earl of Pawtucket,” with the scene laid in the Waldorf-Astoria, New York. When we think what our country is, what myriad problems its various peoples face, our native drama seems sometimes a pitifully tiny scratch on the surface.

And now a young actor, Frank Craven, who became somewhat famous as Brother Jimmy in "Bought and Paid For," has appeared with a new play called "Too Many Cooks," and without any flourish of trumpets, without any proclamation of purpose, without any literary pretensions whatsoever, has made a scratch in a new place, and we are disposed to think a deeper scratch than he knew, or the "literary" dramatists will admit.

"Too Many Cooks" is written in the bald vernacular, with the brisk and picturesque slang of bright, middle-class young men enlivening it. But even this slang is not the sort you can come away quoting. It grows from the situation, and dies with it. The fun of the play, like the language, is born out of the plot at any given moment. None of the characters aspires to a "philosophy," or would recognize such a thing if he met it. There is no preacher in the cast.

Yet the play is real, it sets before us in its quiet, luminous way a cross section of American life and with typical American disregard for any niceties of expression shows us the naïve ideals of the suburbs. In the truer sense of literature—if we must apply a word meant for the printed page to the acted drama—"Too Many Cooks" is literature, because it is a true picture with the power to win our interests and

sympathies, and by winning them to make us see a little plainer and understand a little better a phase of our national life. If this isn't literature in the best sense, as applied to stage performance, we do not know what is. It is not great literature, to be sure, which will always have style and philosophy. But it is far better than the weak imitations of the "near-highbrows."

The hero of "Too Many Cooks," who is played by Mr. Craven (like Gillette and Cohan, he acts as well as writes his pieces), is a genial, bright young middle-class clerk who has fallen in love with a pretty little stenographer, and is going to marry her. His name is Albert Bennett, hers Alice Cook. She is a third generation Irish-American with a good high school education, and all the earmarks of her fiance's class. Just how her Hibernian parents achieved the name Cook is not explained. These parents are only second generation, and her innumerable Cook relatives have not gone so far as she has along the social path. Albert hadn't seen many of the relatives during his courtship, since in his walk of life courtship consists of being left alone with your "girl" in the parlor. If he had, he would simply have said he was marrying her, not her "relations"—which is American, surely!

That, of course, was his mistake—and hers. Trouble comes soon after the rising of the first curtain.

The first set shows the brick foundations of the little home they are building amid the suburban fields somewhere outside of the city. They have saved hard to buy this little plot of ground and erect this tiny cottage. It represents the best dreams and ideals life holds for them. Hopping over the foundations, Albert points tenderly into the vacant air, indicating where each room is to be. But he has brought a friend with him—a bachelor friend, who makes the kind of remarks bachelors do make on such occasions—and Alice doesn't like him. Alice has brought a friend, too, who at once tells Alice that Albert's "den" ought to be her sewing room instead. Albert doesn't like this girl, you may be sure. Then Alice's relatives descend. They are, after all, her relatives, and she loves them. But, alas! they strike terror to the heart of Albert. They begin at once to call the house "our" house, talk about what "we" are going to do, and the clouds gather.

In Act 2 we see the frame of the little home all up. Albert's uncle, who is wealthy and unmarried, has arrived on the scene. In a burst of generosity he tells Albert and Alice he will give them the house.

Then he decides to come and live with them in it, and begins to plan alterations. Alice weeps. Her relatives again appear. It seems her maiden aunt was going to have the room chosen by Albert's uncle (the only spare room in the house). Albert doesn't weep, but he goes around the corner. The act ends with the engagement broken off. To cap Albert's woes, the carpenters go on strike, and we see him at the close trying to lug a bunch of shingles up a ladder, to complete the job himself.

In the last act the house is finished—with the shingles crooked—and Albert is nailing a "For Sale" sign on the street side. He finished it because it was his dream and because he had his dander up. But now he has no use for it. Still, he has planted those rose bushes Alice had planned for, and one of them has borne a single small white blossom, which he contemplates ruefully. We need scarcely add that Alice comes back, and at the close the pair of little dreamers have packed off all the relatives and friends, and realized that they have, first of all, their own lives to live in their own way.

This is a simple tale and it is simply told. But the setting is novel, the working out fresh and bright, and the spirit of it is so human, so wholesome, so sane, the commonplace folks who are its characters

so naturally realized from a class which seldom figures in our drama, that its appeal is quite irresistible.

Mr. Craven plays the part of the young clerk with admirable restraint, quiet humor, and a total freedom from sentimental taint. His dream of a little home is human, not sentimental, and Albert doesn't belong to a class which can make fine speeches. He cloaks his feelings in slang. "Too Many Cooks" is funny, it is wholesome, it is true—and, best of all, it is unconsciously and thoroughly American.

THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SHELDON'S

*“The Song of Songs”—Eltinge Theater,
December 22, 1914*

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's, which is Sudermann's, and which is now Sheldon's. A sibilant fate seems to follow it!

But Solomon need not concern us, the more as he probably had nothing whatever to do with the original song. The play by Edward Sheldon, based on the novel by Hermann Sudermann, is our concern. “The Song of Songs,” in an English translation, has gone into a good many editions and is doubtless familiar to many readers of this review. It is a striking novel, full of that “admirably subtle psychology” which characterizes the continental novelists when they analyze sensual passion, and developing its theme slowly, with a wealth of necessary but unpleasant detail, till it builds up a convincing picture of a certain type of woman—or, let us say, a certain woman—in whom a sensual nature



THE SONG OF SONGS

Act IV

and a passionate seeking for ideal love work together for her undoing. Since Sudermann is a dramatist as well as a novelist, it may be supposed that he considered this theme one essentially adapted to the novel rather than the play form. At any rate, he wrote it as a novel, not a play.

Mr. Sheldon, however, has made it into a play. In doing so he has achieved five acts of hifalutin.

This isn't wholly his fault, by any means. In the first place, he has, no doubt in accordance with managerial suggestion, removed the scene of the play from the Continent to America—to Atlantic City and New York. That alone was a fatal error. Certain stories can be shifted from land to land without any harm befalling them. But stories which are told in the realistic manner, with their effect depending so largely on accumulated detail and their truth being so largely a matter of local conditions, can not be so transplanted. You can not transplant Gorky's "Night Refuge" to a Mills hotel, nor "Anna Karénina" to New York City, nor "Hedda Gabler" to Indianapolis. Neither can you transplant "The Song of Songs." You might, to be sure, select some American character who would correspond in temperament to Lily, and then tell her story. But it would be quite a different story, and your play or

your novel would not be Sudermann's. Sudermann's story is essentially continental. It is so essentially continental that the present writer, who saw the play before he read the book, was constantly uneasy in the theater, declaring to himself over and over, "This thing is not so, this thing is not so." The moment the scene and characters were labeled American they stepped out of the world of reality into the world of pasteboard.

A very good case in point is furnished by the ending to the second act. In the play Lily marries a man who is considerably less of a degenerate than the colonel in the book, and marries him because her lover in the first act, Richard Laird, a member of the Knickerbocker Club, if you please, leaves her without asking for a word of explanation when he finds she knows the old roué, who is a senator instead of a colonel. A year has passed, and Lily has been a good girl. There has been no affair with anybody, as there was with Walter in the novel. But Richard still loves her, and he comes to her room when he thinks the senator is absent from home. The senator surprises him there, and orders Lily out of the house. Now, in the play, she has done nothing wrong, and there has been nothing to suggest that she is that sort. The lover is a young American, a mem-

ber of a fine old family. She beseeches the senator not to throw her out, not to "make her a bad woman," not to drive her into the arms of the other man. He is relentless, and she goes, and we find her in Act III as the gay mistress of Richard, drinking cocktails four years later and kissing all her men visitors.

Why? As Americans we resent this. We have not been shown any reason for such a degeneration in her character, perhaps because the limits of a play do not permit of such intricate psychology as Sudermann used in the novel. But, still more, there is no reason for it in the situation. Richard is represented as an American. Would not his first instinct, then, have been to take Lily to some home where she could remain till she had her divorce, and then have married her? He is not represented, certainly, as seeking her at the beginning with any less honorable intent. She had not sinned. There was no bar an American recognizes. Moreover, her troubles were all due to his foolishness. No, in this American setting, with the lack of subtlety in the character drawing to make matters worse, the latter acts of Mr. Sheldon's play do not belong to the first two acts at all. They do not follow inevitably. In fact, they inevitably do not follow. They are a

mere arbitrary concession to the plot of an alien story. The play, which up to that point was intelligible at least, becomes false, and the picture of Lily going about with her *Song of Songs* hugged to her bosom and babbling about ideals as she turns from one amour to another, becomes ridiculous. Ideals, we say, do not make a woman a strumpet. Of course, they did in Sudermann's novel, because we were carefully led to understand how they were unsupported by reasoning faculties, how they were combined with a nature deeply sensuous to the point of sensuality, and how they were debased in a web of terrible circumstances that are almost inconceivable in our American civilization—meaning, of course, a Saxon civilization, not the narrow world of Broadway, where an alien life prevails amid a chaos of races strongly Semitic.

Accordingly, the play never gets to our emotions, in spite of some very excellent acting. Miss Irene Fenwick sustains the rôle of Lily with considerably more success than might be expected. Of course, nobody who didn't look very young and pretty and virginal could carry it off, and yet any actress with these qualifications is almost sure to lack the powers of subtlety required. Possibly Laurette Taylor could play it, but hardly another. John Mason is

the old senator; Ernest Glendenning the young student whom Lily loves toward the end; Tom Wise the old uncle who makes her drunk; and other excellent players are also concerned. But they can not achieve a moving play. Every effort has been made to put on the stage as much of the sexual element as it is believed the public will stand. No doubt this is what the manager calls "the punch." But the public prefers that appeal in the form (or forms) of the Ziegfeld Follies. "*The Song of Songs*," which is Sudermann's, is a novel, and a German novel. It refuses to become an American play. Thus truth again triumphs, as it has a way of doing.

THE POOR WORKING GIRL SUFFERS AGAIN

*“Common Clay”—Republic Theater,
August 26, 1915*

Mr. Cleves Kinkead, while a special student in Prof. Baker's course in playwriting, won the Craig prize with a drama called “Common Clay,” which was produced in the spring of 1915 by Mr. Craig's stock company at the Castle Square Theater, in Boston. Slightly altered during the summer, it has now been produced at the Republic Theater in New York, with a verse from Kipling misquoted on the program.

In this play, Mr. Kinkead teed up a fine idea and got off a good drive which, however, developed a slice into a bunker. He made a splendid recovery to the edge of the green, but flubbed his chip shot, and then ended disastrously by taking three putts. He might possibly have done a stroke better with some other manager than A. H. Woods for a caddie, but anyway you look at it he isn't down to par yet.

(We write in this fashion because *The New York Tribune* has made its baseball reporter the dramatic critic. We see no reason why golf shouldn't be recognized as well.)

“Common Clay” has two great assets to popularity—the long arm of coincidence and a ruined female. The public dearly loves them both. It has one asset to more serious consideration—it pleads for the proper satisfaction of the normal instinct of youth to get out and have a good time. In that plea we feel that the author was perfectly sincere. In his attempt to weave that plea into a stage narrative, however, his sincerity frequently ran amuck of problems beyond his skill, and the result is, for the most part, in spite of all the good words said for it, a rather false and artificial melodrama, with a few very curious perversions of ethical fundamentals.

The play opens in the “reception room” of the Fullerton house in “any large American city in the middle west.” The Fullertons are giving a reception. They are very rich. Mrs. Fullerton lets it be known that she has trouble in keeping domestics. A look at the wall paper provided by the scenic artist convinces us of the reason. Anyhow, she has just acquired a new domestic, Ellen Neal, played by Jane Cowl. Some twenty years or more before the play

opened Mrs. Fullerton also had acquired a son, who in turn acquired a taste for—well, for domestics. He is at home just now from college, where we hear he is an athlete. (All college men are athletes in the drama, which is why they are played by soft looking actors like Orme Caldara.) He learns from another man at the party that Ellen hasn't been "straight" in the past, so, of course, that eases his conscience and he proceeds to make love to her.

Act II, nearly a year later. There has been a baby—a boy. Ellen demands that he have his share of young Fullerton's fortune, even if he doesn't bear his father's name. The old family friend, Judge Filson, is called in as counsel. Of course, you must realize that John Mason plays this part. Dear, dear, the matter must be kept out of court, to avoid a scandal on the fair name of the Fullertons. The judge faintly suggests to Fullerton *père* that son Hugh might offer to marry the girl. The reason he has this absurd idea, it seems, is because years ago he, Judge Filson, loved a daughter of joy, and she, when about to become a mother, drowned herself rather than hamper his career. This has tended to soften his sympathies—as well it might. The case does get into court, however, and the court scene makes the "big act," for in it Ellen tells why

and how she first went wrong. The story she tells is very human and true, and it is a pity the author had not been literary artist enough to tell it in Ellen's own language, and not a language made up of street slang, "fine writing" and special pleading mixed in equal parts.

Then comes in the long arm of coincidence. Lo and behold, the judge's mistress gave birth to a daughter before she died, and Ellen is the daughter! In the name of Melpomene, why? So there could be a father and daughter scene? The judge, broken in spirit, overwhelmed with emotion, tries to tell Ellen he is her father, and she thinks he is trying to make love to her. That is a good moment. Then she realizes the truth of what he says, and from there on the play falls into the feeblest of conventionalized situation. The judge sends her to Paris to study, and in ten years she returns a radiant prima donna, and falls into the arms of the penitent Hugh Fullerton, who has never ceased to wonder where she is, and has joined the Progressive party. This is told in an epilogue, which for unadulterated mush and sentimental mawkishness and falsity very nearly takes the cake.

It is conceivable that if the play had been done by a more intelligent manager a certain amount of its present crudeness could have been rubbed off.

Since the managers brand their names all over the programs, we feel no hesitation in giving them a share of praise or blame, and, of course, A. H. Woods is not the man to put on a play with a serious purpose. Woods, doubtless, saw in the play a raw appeal. But this raw appeal here is tempered by the author's purpose and pity, so that it to a considerable extent fails of Mr. Woods's intention. "*Common Clay*" remains a curious mixture of the good and the bad—at times almost a fine success, at times merely a creaking melodrama.

Miss Cowl gives a fairly good performance, though in a curiously monotonous and single key. Of course John Mason can handle his rôle without trouble. The "hero" is played by Orme Caldara, a poor choice. In the early acts he should look like a healthy young animal of two and twenty, and his sin with Ellen should be as much the fault of nature as of himself. Mr. Caldara plays the rôle like a typical seducer. He puts a blush where no blush should lurk—or is it a leer?

If Mr. Kinkead is going to continue writing sociological dramas, however, he will need more than a better cast and a wiser manager. He will need to learn that the simple problems of good and evil

are enough to make a play of, without dragging in ridiculous coincidences, and that the only eloquence on the stage is the eloquence of natural speech, spontaneously flowing from the characters.

“THE UNCHASTENED WOMAN,” A REAL CHARACTER STUDY

“*The Unchastened Woman*”—39th Street Theater,
October 9, 1915

To realize what a childish and trivial thing our drama has been, in the main, for many moons, one has only to see Louis K. Anspacher’s new play “The Unchastened Woman,” which was produced in Los Angeles last year by Morosco, and has now been brought into New York by that enterprising manager. The very fact that “The Unchastened Woman” is in no sense a great play; that it is remarkable neither for wit and charming narration, nor cleverness of construction, nor depth of emotional appeal, makes it all the better a test of our dramatic triviality. For, in spite of its lack of any superlative qualities, the spectator, nevertheless, finds himself watching and listening with a vast sense of relief that here, at last, is a play which says something, and something about people.

In short, “The Unchastened Woman” is a char-

acter study—and if you will go through the painful process of recalling to mind all the American plays you've witnessed in the last few years, how many can you honestly say reached the dignity of a character study? Yes, there was "Romance"—we thought of that, too. There was "The Easiest Way." There was "The Concert." No fair—we are talking about American plays. "The Concert" was Teutonic. "Potash and Perlmutter"? Well, have it your own way, but that isn't what we mean by character study. These two gentlemen were genre portraits, perhaps. They were what the average actor means by a "character part." Oh, well, the hour is late. Of course, there was "The Girl With the Green Eyes," by Fitch, and the heroine of his best play, "The Truth"—but poor Fitch has been dead these many years and we who called him a butterfly would now be disposed to call him something considerably more bulky. At least, he was big enough to put real characters on the stage and devote a play to depicting their insides. The best some of the soaring eagles who have followed him can do is to grind out farces and melodramas, and crown G. M. Cohan king.

Mr. Anspacher (who is the husband of Katheryn Kidder) in his new play has followed in Fitch's footsteps, to the extent of making his heroine his chief

concern and picking her from the ranks of the idle and frivolous urban society. His play is centered around this character study; it is the unfolding of this character and the effects wrought by this character on other people which make the interest for the spectator. The character chosen being an interesting (if unusual) one, and the exposition being conducted in the main with skill and fidelity to nature, the comedy has the dignity of real dramatic literature, and, of course, it is popular. We say "of course," because a good play is almost always popular when it is a clear-cut character study.

The Unchastened Woman of the title is a certain Mrs. Caroline Knollys, wife of Hubert Knollys, and she is perhaps Mr. Anspacher's idea of what *Hedda Gabler* would be like if *Hedda* lived in East Sixty-first street, New York. That, of course, is hardly fair either to Mr. Anspacher or *Hedda*—but the idea we wish to convey is that he has attempted the study of a woman who is incapable of being a true and normal wife because of her essentially selfish and trivial nature, and who is equally incapable of being an ultimately unfaithful wife because of her lack of real passions, and still more her fear of the shell of convention. This feline female he has endowed with a kind of perpetual youth, a purring charm, a

dominant will, a pretty wit, and the manners of her luxurious class. Here is meat for the actress, and the promise of trouble enough to keep a story on the jump.

Of course, the trouble comes through Caroline's attempts to win another man away from his wife. He is an architect, and she wishes to emancipate his soul, so she tells him. What she wants to do, of course, is to make as much mischief as she can without herself being scorched. Once, she caught her husband in actual unfaithfulness, and she has that whip over him. She herself has never gone that far—and they live in New York State. Therefore she keeps the protection of his name.

The play would be much more interesting if Caroline had picked out a more interesting victim than Lawrence Sanbury, struggling architect. He is, as her own husband says, pretty feeble game. Yet the author, by choosing him, has nevertheless been able to make use of certain phases of New York life, which, so far as we recall, have hitherto lacked expression. For instance, Lawrence's wife is one of those strong, energetic, idealistic, radical young women who just now are so numerous in New York (and elsewhere) and are often actually accomplishing so much in organization of the garment workers,

in industrial reform, in charities and even in literature. To throw into strong contrast such a woman as this and such a product of the parasitic rich as Caroline Knollys is to create instantly a living, vital dramatic situation. Moreover, Caroline would have Lawrence get on in his profession, as so many architects and artists do get on, by kowtowing and boot-licking to the rich—his wife would have him get on by her ideals instead, by being uncompromisingly himself. When the play begins, it is she who is earning the family living, and they dwell in a “model tenement” on the East Side, among the radicals and the realities. When Caroline comes to this tenement, again we have a striking contrast created. There is no question but Mr. Anspacher has chosen sound material for his play, worth while material, true material.

We do not propose to attempt a narrative of the plot. It is sufficient to say that Caroline goes a little too far with Lawrence, evidently because for once something approximating a human passion stirs in her, and her husband is able to get a whip hand over her—based, to be sure, on evidence he knows really does not mean actual guilt, but which would ruin the conventional reputation she needs for her worldly position. With that aid, he and Mrs. Sanbury be-

tween them save Lawrence from her clutches, though by this time Mrs. Sanbury has realized that her husband is hardly in her class for manhood, and you wonder, rather, whether Mr. Anspacher really expects you to accept their final reconciliation as a happy ending. Meanwhile, after humiliating Caroline by forcing her publicly to apologize for certain things she has said, the rest of the characters have to see her make a final exit quite unchastened, with a smiling and rapierlike innuendo on her lips. She isn't regenerated. She is never sympathetic. Unlike Hedda, she isn't even tragic. Yet she is the heroine and pivot of the play—and it is packing the theater.

The part is played by Miss Emily Stevens, and it is quite the best performance she has ever given. To be sure, it is quite the best part she has ever had. She talks more than ever like her relative, Mrs. Fiske. And, too, she is allowing certain mannerisms of facial contortion, and the like, to set. Nevertheless, she has conceived the character as a whole, and executed her portrait with minute fidelity. The charm of the woman, the vampire allure, the worldly ease, the ready wit, the restless, neurasthenic vacancy of life, the selfish cruelty, are all indicated surely, easily and vividly. If the performance has one

fault more than another, it is a fault also inherent in the play—the note of a real passion for Lawrence is not clearly enough indicated. The play is lacking here, and Miss Stevens's art also is lacking in that suggestion. In this degenerate age of acting, however, it is wisest to be grateful for a true character study, and not cavil.

Others in an excellently trained cast who deserve mention are H. Reeves Smith, as Caroline's middle-aged, ironically humorous and politely worldly husband, and Miss Christine Norman as the wife of the young architect, who wears flat-heeled boots because she insists on the union label and is a woman of poise, intellect, deep feeling, and profound ideals. Miss Norman's performance is, in its way, a gem of quiet force and suggestiveness. The mere physical contrast between the two women, as they appear on the stage, vividly paints the theme.

The dialogue of the play, contrary to what we might expect from some of Mr. Anspacher's published works, is not verbose, and it is colloquial without losing dignity and gracefulness. All in all, he is to be congratulated on a sound piece of work well produced and acted, and most deservedly popular.

THE EASY LOT OF THE STAGE HERO

*“Hit-the-Trail Holliday”—Astor Theater,
September 13, 1915*

One of the British scientists of the nineteenth century—Grant Allen, was it not?—said that a man with a first-class mind never wanted to go to “the serious drama” of an evening. He wanted the complete relaxation of the music hall. The serious drama, said this scientist, is for middle-class intellects—his idea no doubt being that reality is of so much more importance than the usual little apings of it in the playhouse that the man who sees reality with large vision can only be bored in the theater.

This is an extreme point of view, but it is one most of us have now and again shared. Against the stupendous reality of the Great War now raging in Europe, for example, how petty, how futile, how almost insulting the war plays of the hour seem; yes, even “Moloch,” though it is head and shoulders above the rest. A little harmless flash-light powder exploded, the “props” knocked out from under some

pasteboard, a few actors falling down and playing dead—and this in the face of the red shambles of the Marne! The vaudeville performer balancing a billiard ball on the end of his nose is at least doing something that von Hindenberg probably can't. His achievement is real.

Nor is it only at war plays that we sometimes know this feeling toward the stage; nor do we have to be "first class minds" to know it. Darwin couldn't endure Shakespeare, which may have been rather a sign that even first-class minds have their limitations. The middle-class mind which can enjoy Shakespeare has just so much advantage. Yet even the middle-class mind experiences its periods of annoyance at the puerilities of drama; only it asks that the drama rather measure up to Shakespeare than down to the music halls. Even the middle-class mind knows moments of doubt, when it seems as if the conventions which rule in the playhouse are really too childish to endure, when it seems as if popular appeal in the drama is based on something so far removed from reality that it isn't worthy of attention. Perhaps a critic shouldn't make these confessions, but there are times when it is impossible not to.

Consider the case of George Cohan's new play,

“Hit-the-Trail Holliday.” Mr. Cohan, we are told, is a veritable superman in knowing what the public wants, and giving it to them. In fact, he knows what the public wants when the public doesn’t, and makes ‘em want his brand! Billy Holliday, the hero of the play, is a barkeeper. But he is more than that. He is a Sandow, a Romeo, a Demosthenes, a Lloyd George, a Dwight L. Moody, and a George Ade. In short, he is a Cohanesque hero. To be sure, we have to accept his possession of the attributes of all these great men largely on faith, but how gladly we do so! Externally, Billy Holliday doesn’t even look like a bar-keeper. He looks like a prosperous young actor from the Lambs Club. But we are assured that he is a bar-keeper who gets \$100 a week for mixing drinks. We assume that he is a Romeo, because by the second act the minister’s daughter is letting him hold her hand. We assume that he is a Sandow because he pulls the villain all over the stage by the nose. We are confident that he is a mixture of Demosthenes and Neil Dow because between Acts I and II he makes a magnificent temperance oration which gets reported with six-column scarehead lines in the *New York Tribune*. That he is Lloyd George is readily proved by the ease with which he quells a riot of brewery

employees and gives them all a dollar a day more to work in a new temperance drink factory, which he organizes over night and makes a howling success in a week.

How magnificently easy it all is! How every situation, every character, in the play "feeds up" this hero! Everything comes his way. Opposition? Pff—a snap of the finger, a dental smile, a slang phrase—and it is crushed, obliterated, wiped out of existence, and our hero goes on his triumphal way. He never really has to fight, he never really has to possess the weapons of brain and heart to fight with. He is a stage hero. Events and people all feed him up. He basks in an eternal spot light, with a wreath upon his brow.

That is the kind of part an actor dearly loves to play, and we assume it is the kind of part the public dearly loves to see played. Sometimes, on witnessing such a performance, even the middle-class mind may be forgiven a preference for the vaudeville performer who balances a billiard ball upon his nose. He is really overcoming opposition. The firm determination of a billiard ball not to remain on the end of the human nose is something not easily to be altered. The man who can conquer this opposition is at least endowed with steady nerves and

infinite persistence. Nobody feeds him up. His struggle is more like the struggle of life itself.

Perhaps, after all, it boils down to this—that the public doesn't really want to see life itself in the playhouse, but something as different as possible, while retaining the external semblance to make it look as if life might be that way. Perhaps the scientist, who dealt daily with realities, felt this, and looked upon the theatre as a sham and a delusion. Perhaps the star-actor who demands a play in which all the other characters feed him up is following a right instinct—right, at least, from the point of theatrical success. We would all like to be heroes. The golfing duffer puts himself to sleep planning how he might possibly do his course in even fours. (Owen Johnson once made it even threes and then next day wrote a story about it.) We all love to dream of wealth acquired at a stroke and fame achieved by some spectacular performance. And, just as the golf duffer does once in a blue moon pull off a long hole one under par, so life taunts us all by now and then throwing the limelight of fame on an easy achievement. It keeps the duffer playing golf, and it keeps the rest of us in the theatre, perhaps, applauding the representation of the puerile and the impossible.

DON JUAN REDIVIVUS

*“The Great Lover”—Longacre Theater,
November 10, 1915*

The Hattons, of Chicago, collaborating with Leo Ditrichstein, have dramatized the male opera star, the great tenor—only in this case he is the great barytone, the Don Giovanni of his generation. The original Don came to his end at the hands of the commander's ghost; but this reincarnation, called Jean Paurel, comes to his end merely by losing his voice, and his tragedy is that he faces a long life of recollections of past performances, rather than anticipations of performances to come. We refer, of course, to performances in the court of love no less than on the stage of opera. The play is called “The Great Lover,” and the leading part is taken by Mr. Ditrichstein himself. The production was an instantaneous success and will likely be in New York for the balance of the winter.

Three factors contribute to the chances of success for a play with this theme.

First, the stars of the music world, especially of opera, seem always to live a life apart, and with them we unconsciously always associate the glamour of great auditoriums alive with lights and jewels, the throb of orchestras, the peal of song. They are pre-destined characters of romance.

Second, the tragedy of the middle-aged artist, the failing of voice, the vanishing of charm, is a tragedy which appeals peculiarly to the interest and the compassion of laymen, especially of the gentler sex. It is a tragedy for any woman to find the wrinkles round her eyes, and she knows how keen a tragedy it must be for the beautiful actress to realize on some gray dawn that she is no longer beautiful, that her day is over. Perhaps there are more of us males than admit it who know the pangs of sorrow at our failure any longer to attract the female smile, and we can understand the tragedy of *Don Giovanni*—we who in our secret hearts have always envied him!

Third, a play about the opera, with the scene laid in New York, with a set reproducing exactly the director's room in the Metropolitan Opera house, with the leading character called Paurel (one letter changed would make it Maurel, who was the greatest impersonator of the *Don* in his generation), and with much of the acting duplicating what we have

read about the rows between singers, the trials and tribulations of directors in dealing with these temperamental children—such a play is sure to attract curiosity in New York. It seems, somehow, peculiarly our own. Romantic though it is, it answers our need for a play about ourselves.

So "*The Great Lover*," granted a good cast, a good director, and a bit of skill in the writing, was about as sure fire as anything can be in the theater. It got the good cast, it got one of our best stage managers in Sam Forrest, general stage director for Cohan & Harris, and it is written with skill and briskness. The result is a packed house at every performance.

The first act is the liveliest, and is largely given over to a picture of the troubles of the manager of the opera house. Singers to right of him, singers to left of him, conductors behind him and in front of him, volley and sputter. The major portion of the drama occurs in the second act, in Paurel's dressing room between acts of "*Don Giovanni*." Paurel is in love with Ethel Warren, a young American girl, a soprano in the company. She, in turn, is really in love with Carlo Sonino, a young American-born barytone, understudy to the great Paurel. But Sonino is jealous of her, and in a fit of pique she says

she will marry Paurel. But Sabittini, Italian soprano, an old flame of Paurel, is to be reckoned with. In the excitement of the scene she causes, Paurel shouts and storms—and suddenly his voice leaves him. At the end of the act he stands sobbing by the door while his youthful understudy is heard out on the stage, singing gloriously the music of the world's most glorious opera.

In the last act Paurel learns that he will never sing again. He also realizes that Miss Warren does not really love him, and he makes the one sacrifice he has ever made in his pampered life, and gives her up. Then he is left alone with his old servant and his love letters—twenty years of love letters, catalogued by seasons. The old servant gets them out. They are his version of Leporello's list! Yet the telephone rings at the end, and it is a woman. He is making a date with her as the curtain falls. Thus should Don Giovanni pass—game to the finish.

Mr. Ditrichstein's performance of Paurel is superficially a vivid characterization, touched with whimsical eccentricity, full of childlike vanities, deliciously Latin in its suavity and Latin, too, in its gusts of temper. It is superficially so vivid, indeed, that perhaps many people will not realize that it is lacking in genuine romantic charm and consequently

lacking in what should be the closing note of the play—pathos. That the pathos would be ironic does not alter our statement. When we pause to think how Mansfield would have played that closing act, we can see Mr. Ditrichstein's limitations. We may well pause, too, to reflect how Mansfield would have looked in his costume of the Don—dressed probably more as Renaud dressed him, than in the conventional doublet and hose—Mansfield with a full if oddly stiff romantic swagger, with a style free from all taint of the finicky, with gestures that were not timid but seemed to sweep with the sweep of the orchestral rhythm. It is a limitation of Mr. Ditrichstein that he can not be truly romantic nor pathetic, and that he can not quite measure up to the grand style of an operatic hero. Since his performance, which is indeed a notable one, is now being hailed as a supremely great one, it is wise to make these reservations in the interest of truth. It is not a great performance, any more than the play is a great play. It is the kind of performance our stage ought to be able to show half a dozen times a season—but, alas, in recent years doesn't furnish more than once in every two or three seasons.

In such a play as this, where so many of the characters must look foreign and splutter in German,

French and Italian, naturally the members of the cast have been chosen for their fitness thus to splutter. Where all the Italians came from we do not know, but they seem to be quite as good actors as anybody could wish for. Miss Beverly Sitgreaves, one of the best players our native stage boasts, takes the part of the Italian prima donna, however, and gives a vivid and delightfully temperamental and vindictive performance. She could not be more in the picture if her name were really Sabittini.

The play is prefaced by the immortal overture to "Don Giovanni," to which nobody pays the slightest attention.

MRS. FISKE AMONG THE MENNONITES

*“Erstwhile Susan,” Gaiety Theater,
January 18, 1916*

The return to the New York stage of the most brilliant actress now playing in the English tongue attracted an exceptional audience to the Gaiety Theater, and this audience was rewarded by an evening of exceptional enjoyment. Future audiences may not have quite so good a time, because that first assemblage was made up so largely of other players—and it takes a player to appreciate to the full, perhaps, the extraordinary art of Mrs. Fiske. Moreover, there was in the air that night a rare feeling of expectancy before she appeared and a warm glow of welcome after she came out, which made the evening memorable. Mrs. Fiske has not looked slimmer and trimmer in many a year, and not in a long while has she acted with such abundant vitality and such infectious good spirits.

She has had better parts to play. Her present rôle really makes very little demand upon her powers,

though it is doubtful if any other actress in the country could have triumphed in it, except possibly May Irwin, who, of course, would have played it quite differently. What, however, is a slight demand on Mrs. Fiske's powers may be a fatal drain on many another's. The first, and the last, impression one takes away from "*Erstwhile Susan*," her new play, is the impression of mastership. Stronger than any impression of the story, any impression of the character Mrs. Fiske plays, is this sense of a personality vibrant with vitality, of a mind marvelously alert, of a voice trained to every shade of feeling and expression, of a technical mastery of all the tricks of the trade which enables this player to pick up a part, a play, and carry it smilingly off on her little shrugging shoulders. The players who give us this sense in the theater now are so few, their appearance so infrequent, and, moreover, we have been so satiated of late with the "*silent drama*," that Mrs. Fiske swept back, after three years of absence, like a cleansing wind, and the grateful audience on that opening night simply rose to her joyously and uncritically, and actually cheered. It was very much as if a crowd of music lovers who had for years heard nothing but ragtime ditties on a phonograph were suddenly face to face with Melba in her prime.

The play Mrs. Fiske has elected to reappear in is a curious little concoction, made by Marian de Forest from a novel of Pennsylvania Dutch life by Helen Martin, called "Barnabettia." The Pennsylvania Dutch are comparatively virgin material for the American dramatist, and doubtless a folk comedy as quaint as "Hobson's Choice" could have been made about them. We are told that it was to be found in the novel. But either the dramatist or Mrs. Fiske has elected to follow another course. Instead of writing in a vein of folk comedy, the dramatist has written in a vein of burlesque, gentle burlesque which preserves character outlines, to be sure, but which is burlesque, none the less. In other words, the play is not written in the key of the modern Manchester school or Irish school, but rather in the key of the American character comedies of an earlier day. This would be a great pity if anybody but Mrs. Fiske were the star. As it is, however, we are inclined to think it was the wise course. Mrs. Fiske was out for a romp, and when she is out for a romp and has the license a touch of burlesque gives her (as in "Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh"), there is no living player who can furnish such delightful, such side-splitting entertainment. So "Erstwhile Susan" is dashed with American caricature, it is reminiscent

of the Florences, it has a primitive native tang.

The part Mrs. Fiske plays is that of an elocutionist from Iowa, a quaint creature who lectures on woman's rights, bursts out into frequent quotations from Shakespeare and other poets, dresses like a freak and has, in short, a somewhat ridiculous self-made "culture." It is ridiculous, but it is touching, too. The woman's heart is so good, her ways so brisk, her mind so alert, her sympathies so warm. Her sympathies are so warm, in fact, that she answers a matrimonial advertisement, and comes to Reinhartz, Pa., to marry a Pennsylvania Dutchman who has killed two wives already with overwork, solely that she may mother his poor, overworked daughter Barnabetta, and incidentally bring the uplift to the other down-trodden females of this community.

Mrs. Fiske enters on the scene after the character of Barnaby Dreary, the Dutchman, is established, and we have seen the slavery of his drudge of a daughter, and the masculine selfishness of his two lunking sons. The posture of circumstances may be far fetched—who cares? It gets Mrs. Fiske into this household, and any reader with a spark of imagination can gather the fun which ensues as she proceeds on her taming and uplifting process. It is a

performance of extraordinary comic brilliance, done in bold, strong outline, and its appeal is heightened by the fact that Mrs. Fiske has put opposite her, in the character of Barnaby Dreary, John Cope, an accomplished and forceful actor. She is one of those wise players who knows that a performance does not really shine by contrast, in a poor cast, but by competition, in a good cast. The climax of fun is reached at the curtain of the second act, when Barnaby gets a whip to beat poor Barnabetta, and Mrs. Fiske, to his utter amazement, snatches it from him, throws it through the window, and then hurls at his head these astounding words—"You damn Dutchman!"

Mrs. Fiske is too fine an actress not to create a real character out of the Iowa elocutionist. She is consistent, and she brings out with consummate ease, when necessary, the lurking woman's tenderness. But the part, like the play, is none the less exaggerated, delicately burlesqued. It is a sort of comic bravura, and executed with all the brilliance of a Melba singing trills, a Kreisler with his magic bow. The lovers of acting in America—and the movies have not destroyed them all—will flock to this performance, and they will be richly repaid.

SECTION II
FOREIGN PLAYS

EVIE
1875



POMANDER WALK

A LITTLE SIDE-STREET IN ARCADY

*“Pomander Walk”—Wallack’s Theater,
December 20, 1910*

A. B. Walkley said of “Quality Street,” eight years ago, “it makes us, like St. Augustine in his youth, in love with love. It has laid us up in lavender.” In much the same words might the critic write to-day of “Pomander Walk,” by Louis N. Parker, now visible at Wallack’s Theater in New York. That play, too, is of the period and the persuasion of Jane Austen. It is King George’s England preserved in lavender and rose leaves for a century.

Not, of course, that we quite agree that either “Pomander Walk” or “Quality Street” makes us in love with love exactly after the manner of St. Augustine in his youth! The search for literary illustrations to adorn one’s criticisms sometimes leads the critic into unfortunate suggestion. Nor can we quite truthfully say that “Pomander Walk” has laid us away in lavender. Lavender there is, but mingled

with its odor is the scent of the old Admiral Sir Peter's good black 'baccy. We trust the ladies will not object; indeed, we fancy that a whiff of the masculine is not amiss in Arcady. But, like "Quality Street," "Pomander Walk" puts forth the spell of an old-world charm, the romance of a vanished day; like Mr. Barrie's work, it breathes the charity and simplicity and mellow, merry sympathy of a sweet-souled author; like the old three-decker in Kipling's poem, it's "taking tired people to the islands of the blest."

Yet Mr. Parker's work is strangely deficient in what the scholastic gentlemen who discover the laws of the drama and embalm them in books would tell us are the essentials of a good play. It has the slightest of plots. The curtains do not descend upon climaxes of the action. There are no climaxes in the action. It is as quiet in movement as the works of Jane Austen herself, and, though it does develop skillfully and surely its little thread of story, it conquers not by that, but by its static qualities of charm and sympathy. It conquers because, in an exquisite pictorial setting, it shows us a group of charming, old-worldly people, lets us hear their simple talk, look into their simple breasts, and, ultimately, into

the tender, simple heart of Louis N. Parker. Before such a revelation the relative importance of "the well-made play" shrinks to insignificance. Charm may cheerfully break all rules. Nothing happens in "Pomander Walk"—yet everything happens. Men and women love and laugh and are happy. The glow arises of romance. Life is sweeter for the picture. The stage becomes more endeared to us for the memory of this play. We hail it as the most important contribution of the season.

Pomander Walk (the very name is fragrant!) is, according to the programme, "Out Chiswick way, halfway to Fairyland." It comprises a little block of five houses in the pretty Georgian style, facing on a tree-shaded walk and flanked by the river. Beyond the river you see the English fields. Little wrought-iron grills fence off each tiny garden plot before the houses. Ivy clammers over the doors. The period is 1805; the costumes those of the Empire. The first house is inhabited by the Admiral Sir Peter Antrobus, who lost an eye with Nelson. He is a bluff, peppery, tender, lovable old chap, who has great trouble suppressing his nautical vocabulary in the presence of ladies. He has his own ideas of humor. When he wishes to cheer some one up he

says: "Let me tell you something funny—how I lost my eye!" He is pursued by the Widow Pamela Poskett, who lives next door with her cat.

In the third house live the Misses Ruth and Barbara Pennymint, with Barbara's parrot, Samuel Johnson—"named after the great lexicographer, you know"—and their lodger, a young violinist, who is too shy to tell Barbara that he loves her. In the fourth house lives a pompous, *Pickwickian* person, Jerome Brooke-Hoskyn, Esq., with his family and a lodger. Now, Brooke-Hoskyn has added the "Brooke." In reality he is a retired butler. His fine airs and pompous assumption of acquaintance with noble gentlemen are a bluff to dazzle the simple souls of Pomander Walk. Yet, for the life of you, you can't wish that he be found out; you rejoice when his secret is kept. He adds a broad, sturdy touch of Dickens to the Jane Austen atmosphere of the piece.

In the last house dwells a widow, Mme. Lucie Lachesnais, and her lovely daughter Marjolaine. Nor must we forget the Eyesore, a ragged intruder who continually sits fishing on the river bank and never lands a fish.

And the story? The play progresses with simple, pleasant, human talk, tinged with merriment, and

not, as in "Quality Street," attempting to reproduce the stilted rhetoric of the period. Perhaps for such literary subtlety Mr. Parker does not feel himself fitted. We see Marjolaine fall into the wonder of first love with young Lieutenant John Sayle, R. N., who comes to visit his old commander, the Admiral, and him into the wonder of love for her. We learn how his titled father once loved Marjolaine's mother, leaving her for a rich marriage at his father's desire, just as he now desires young Jack to do. We see the young lovers triumph gayly over parental opposition and we watch their parents reunited in the autumn of their days. We learn how Barbara catches her shy fiddler by the aid of Samuel Johnson, the loquacious. We see the old Admiral forced at last to strike his colors before the artillery of the Widow Poskett. We see Brooke-Hoskyn escape detection. And as the moon rises and the lamp-lighter puts out the lamps along Pomander Walk, leaving the lovers, old and young, grouped in its silvery rays, we see the Eyesore land a perch at last —a great, fat perch with shining scales.

Of course, for such a play as this, fine acting is required, and fine stage management. It has received both. The author himself was the stage manager, and the choice of the company was left to

him. George Giddens, a splendid actor of the "old school," who has played Tony Lumpkin in *America* in years past, plays the Admiral Sir Peter, and shows us how ripeness and training may raise an impersonation into rounded life. The author's daughter, Miss Dorothy Parker, on the other hand, makes her very first stage appearance as Marjolaine, and shows us how natural talent and unspoiled naïveté may contribute to a picture of youth and innocence. All the other players are good and enter with willing understanding into the idyllic mood of the comedy. You feel it is no perfunctory task they are performing. In a play that breathes the spirit of love, they act with loving care.

And some of us doubly rejoice that the play is presented at Wallack's Theater. In the raw newness of Broadway, Wallack's remains a landmark, dingy perhaps and overlarge, but haunted with memories of the great comedian who gave it its name, linking us with the past, with an honorable tradition of dramatic art. Among the various elements which must co-operate to create charm in the playhouse the theater itself surely is one. The playwright is essential, the manager with a real love of his business, with something of the artist's devotion, the willing and skillful actors, the stage director with imagina-

tion, taste and feeling. But the theater, too, is needed, where memories awake, as we enter the portal, of the vanished charm of other days, where our affection is roused and our fancies stirred in anticipation.

All these elements have been combined in the production of "Pomander Walk." To old theater-goers it can bring no sighs for "the days that are no more," for it breathes their very essence. For young theater-goers it can only make the present more delightful and the future more bright, for by making us in love with love, with life, it makes us thereby in love with the theater. It brings to the playhouse in New York what that playhouse so sorely needs, glamour and sweetness and charm.

A LITTLE FLYER IN JOY

“Hindle Wakes,” Maxine Elliott’s Theater, Dec. 9, 1912

“Hindle Wakes” was for some weeks visible at Maxine Elliott’s Theater—visible if not visited. It then departed to tour the country. This drama, by Stanley Houghton, is one of the genre productions of Miss Horniman’s Manchester Theater, and is acted by players from her company, rehearsed by her stage manager. It offers, therefore, a very fair opportunity to estimate something of the results Miss Horniman is achieving in the English mill city of Manchester, at first blush a rather sooty cradle, one would say, for the arts.

We have nothing like Miss Horniman’s repertory theater in America. Its nearest counterpart with which we are familiar is the Abbey Theater of Dublin; but, of course, there is less national spirit to the Manchester venture. Miss Horniman is not advertising an English revival, but simply trying to develop a repertory company in her city, and to

encourage local playwrights. If somebody should start a repertory theater in Pittsburgh, and local playwrights there should have produced in it dramas about the Pennsylvania Dutch and life in the oil well and coal districts, we should have a fair analogy.

“Hindle Wakes” is a tale of life among the weavers of Hindle, a Lancashire town, and it is written in Lancashire idiom, and spoken in Lancashire dialect. It is acted by a company who seem in some cases not very remotely removed from talented amateurs, with the simplicity of gesture and movement, the emphasis on text, characteristic of the Irish players from Dublin. Unfortunately, the text is much less attractive in sound than the dialogue of Yeats and Synge. The stage management, too, is stiffer and more conventional.

But that is far less important than the fact that the play has been written and produced at all. It does not happen to be so large and gripping a play as “Rutherford and Son,” which is a piece of realism about a similar district of England, nor is it nearly so well acted as is “Rutherford and Son” by Norman McKinnel and his London professionals. But, none the less, “Hindle Wakes” has all the earmarks of local authenticity, its very stiffness of presentation

but betokening its authentic local origin the more. What does that mean? It means that the drama is alive in Manchester. It means that Manchester is not simply sitting back and taking what second company crumbs are dropped now and again from the London table, but is able to write and produce dramas of its own, dramas good enough to send up to London, and even across the pond to New York. It means that the drama in Manchester, like the tariff, is a local issue.

Think if that were the case in the United States! Think of the cities we have, far from New York, which are at present utterly dependent on New York for their dramatic fare, and which have a rich local mine of material about them at present quite un-worked either because nobody has been developed to work it, or because it would not be palatable—sup-posedly—on Broadway! The real New England play, for example, has never been written. James A. Herne scratched the surface in "Shore Acres," but the "Way Down East" sort of by-gosh drama is no more New England realism than it is Chinese. Where is the Pittsburgh play? Why isn't Meredith Nicholson writing the racy, homely comedy and romance of his beloved Indianapolis and its surround-ing country, for a repertory theater there, where the

audiences would understand? Surely there is a drama in Charleston, S. C.! We could multiply endlessly the opportunities.

But, as matters stand, the dramatist must be able to come up to Broadway or Chicago (or now and again, at most, Boston and Los Angeles), with his wares, and he must be able to deliver goods which will "get across" on Broadway. Is it any wonder there is no authentic realism in our American genre plays? What, for instance, did Broadway know, or care, about the G. A. R. when Warfield produced "The Grand Army Man"? You have to go back into what Meredith Nicholson loves to call provincial America to find a general love for and understanding of the G. A. R. Of course, George Ade's "College Widow" was a real genre comedy, even if exaggerated. His sense of fun was great enough to turn the trick. But he offers only the traditional proof of an exception. The fact remains that the theater is not a live issue in America, not a local issue, outside of two or three of our largest cities. Because this always has been so is no reason why it always should be so—as we seem to suppose. It always had been so in Manchester till Miss Horniman came along.

What will be the first American city to wake up?

They all have stock companies playing two and three year old Broadway successes in the traditional stock manner. There isn't a real repertory theater in the whole land, nor half a dozen stock managers who ever produce a new play unless some New York manager pays them to do it. None of our stock companies has so much as dreamed of developing local playwrights. Isn't it stupid? Isn't it, when you come to think the matter over, almost ridiculous? The whole nation needs a new declaration of theatrical independence.

But now about "Hindle Wakes." The charm of the play—for it has a distinct charm to all who possess sufficient imagination to enjoy a picture of a life foreign to their own—resides in the quiet and seemingly quite unexaggerated and authentic depiction of the ideals and manners and habits of the Lancashire weavers. The story is extremely simple. Christopher Hawthorn is an old weaver, who is still a weaver, with a full-blooded and high-spirited daughter, Fanny, who is, like her father, a worker in the mills. But Christopher's old boyhood friend, Nathaniel Jeffcote, has risen from the loom to be the owner of the mill, and his boy Alan is thus in a social class above Fanny. We see here what money does for the second generation.

Well, during bank holiday—when Hindle holds its “wakes,” Fanny goes off for a week-end holiday, and so does Alan. They meet, and spend the holidays together. The fact is discovered by Fanny’s parents. To their simple code, the only possible thing now is to have Alan marry Fanny.

Christopher goes up to the house of his old friend Nathaniel and puts the case to that testy, canny, self-willed, but honest and fair-minded man. He is enraged, but agrees that Alan must marry Fanny, even though it means breaking off a match with another girl, daughter of a second mill owner, which would unite the two properties.

Well, the subject is thrashed out from all sides, and we get an insight into these people’s lives in the process—and then Fanny has her say. It’s about time, she thinks! She won’t marry Alan. She doesn’t want Alan. She doesn’t care anything about Alan. She was a passing fancy with him, just a lark, was she? Men are built that way, are they? Well, he was just a passing fancy, a lark, with her, too! Women can be built that way, also! When she marries she proposes to get a man, she does, and of her own picking.

And Fanny has her way. We must admit that she has the audience’s sympathy. It certainly

wasn't going to mend matters to marry her off to Alan, and somehow there was a force of character in the girl as played by Miss Emilie Polini which made you sure she would come out all right after this little flyer in joy. Naturally, it was all something of a snap for Alan, as his fiancée forgave him. But maybe that is realistic, too. The fiancée wasn't a new woman, like Fanny, and she followed the easy code of old-fashioned forgiveness.

The theme of the play is not very new, then, nor perhaps important, in spite of the supposition in some quarters that Fanny's outburst of belated self-respect is a great blow for Feminism. What is important is the faithful, illuminating disclosures of a race of people, a state of society, in a corner of England—of their speech, their habits, their ideals. Any such faithful disclosure is always important and of interest. This one is doubly so, because it was made possible by the Manchester repertory theater, and so shows us that similar disclosures might be made in the United States, about the various interesting subdivisions of our national society.

THE PIGEON

Act II



AN INTIMATE THEATER AND AN UNUSUAL PLAY

“The Pigeon”—Little Theater, March 11, 1912

One of the most interesting, and we are inclined to think one of the most important, theatrical events of the winter is the launching of Winthrop Ames' Little Theater. The opening attraction was Galsworthy's new play, "The Pigeon," a fascinating drama almost flawlessly acted. Mr. Ames has begun his novel work with fortune smiling, and he has deserved his success and our gratitude.

The Little Theater is one of the most beautiful play houses in America. It is situated on Forty-fourth street, just west of Long Acre Square. Two old houses have given way to it. The front is no higher than the old houses, but instead of remaining brown stone, it is colonial brick, with a simple colonial entrance in white, and old-fashioned wooden window shutters. The wooden sign swings out over the sidewalk like the sign of an ancient inn. The interior is also colonial, or more properly Georgian,

but very rich. The auditorium has no balconies, and seats but 300 people, in widely spaced, comfortable chairs. There are no boxes. The walls are paneled half way up with quartered oak, and oak pilasters continue to the ceiling, framing tapestries. The ceiling is flat, white and embossed with a colonial wreath design in very low relief. The chandeliers are, of course, the old cut glass pendant type. The stage opening is small. The lobbies are, like the auditorium, intimate rooms, and downstairs is a coffee-room, where refreshments are served gratis between acts, quite like afternoon tea. The whole atmosphere is that of social intimacy, exquisite taste, quiet refinement, good breeding. There is no theater like it in size and style, and only the Maxine Elliott Theater can even compare with it in charm.

In such a house, of course, the plays must have an intimate appeal, and they ought, as well, to have distinct quality. It is a theater for the presentation of exceptional drama, drama that of necessity is not always well fitted to meet the diverse demands of the larger playhouses. Such drama exists. A theater to welcome it ought to exist. Mr. Ames has provided such a theater and provided it with prodigal hand.

“The Pigeon,” his first bill, is an exceptional play,

a fascinating, thoughtful, human play (though full of delightful comedy), and it is acted by an exceptional company, drilled into a flawless ensemble.

Mr. Ames has retained as stage director George Foster Platt, who was his director at the New Theater, a man who works at his best in an intimate auditorium, and he has also retained Wilfrid North, his assistant stage director at the New Theater. Further, he still has in his company Miss Matthison (though she is not in "*The Pigeon*"), Miss Pamela Gaythorne and several minor players. The new members of his staff, however, are not players who have been spoiled by the star system, and they have worked at the very start into the spirit of ensemble playing. Among them are Russ Whytal, Frank Reicher and Sidney Valentine, three fine actors, who, in "*The Pigeon*," perform in a way to restore our sometimes tottering faith in latter-day histrionic art. Mr. Ames, obviously, gained experience at the New Theater. He also achieved the nucleus of an organization, which he has brought over with him, and so starts with a considerable advantage.

"*The Pigeon*" is now available in book form. We need not, therefore, describe it minutely, for most people who are interested in the finer things in the modern theater will undoubtedly procure it.

Mr. Galsworthy describes it as a fantasy. It is not, however, fantastic. Evidently Galsworthy's idea of being fantastic is merely to smile while talking tenderly and touchingly about sad or serious things. That is characteristic of an author who comes so modestly to New York to see his play that nobody knew he was coming till the steamer arrived, and who takes a walk in Central Park while his play is being produced. Mr. Galsworthy inevitably reminds one of Arnold Bennett—he's so different!

Superficially, and only superficially, "The Pigeon" resembles "Passers-by." In each play waifs of the London streets come into the action. But there the similarity ceases. In "Passers-by" the real interest was not in the waifs, but in the sentimental story of the young London bachelor who invited them in. "The Pigeon," on the other hand, has no sentimental story. In a way, it is almost as neuter as "Strife." Its interest lies in the problem of the waifs themselves, and its message, beautifully and tenderly expressed by the action, is simply that to help such folk at all effectively the essential thing is not a public court nor an organized charity nor a soup kitchen, but rather love and understanding. The Pigeon of the title is an old artist who cannot help

loving these human wrecks, and who is called a pigeon because they pluck him.

His daughter calls them "rottters." All through the play the poor girl makes determined effort to keep her father from bringing these waifs into his studio. Finally, she makes him move to a new studio, up seven flights, without a "lift," in order to avoid both the "rottters," and the philanthropic vicar, and the professor with social theories, and the police magistrate who believes in the reformatory value of the workhouse. But, at the end, the poor old artist gives his new address to all of them. "It's stronger than me," he wails. It is his dissipation. His love for them is his weakness. But it is also his strength. It is he alone who gets to the waifs at all. The play is not a plea for a social theory. It is a plea for love and sympathy and understanding.

Russ Whytal is a sweet, benignant figure as the old artist, who, the tramp says, can hardly be a Christian, because he has such a kind face. The three waifs are a London flower girl, who later goes on the streets, played touchingly by Parmela Gaythorne, Timson, a tipsy old cabbie, played with irresistible humor by Sidney Valentine, and Ferrand, a tramp (a character out of one of the author's earlier books), played by Frank Reicher. Ferrand is no

ordinary vagabond of the comic papers. He is a cosmopolitan vagabond, French by blood, full of quaint, racy idiom, with a strong vein of philosophy—a truly extraordinary man. He is a man who would have been a considerable success in the world if he had been differently balanced, if he had been endowed with concentration instead of the wanderlust. The type is not unknown. It is not even rare (though people who have had no experience of the underworld will not believe this). But no doubt it is more common in Europe than America, and for that reason Frank Reicher's German blood possibly enabled him to understand the character better. He plays it, certainly, with wonderful feeling. All the humor, all the philosophy, all the pathetic futility of this strange being are in his impersonation. The character goes beyond the confines of the stage. He is a real man. You wander with him over the globe, see the world from his point of view, and realize at last the grim futility of institutional charity to catch and tame such a wild bird, to reform him by giving him a bath.

“But,” he cries to the artist, “are you really English? You treat me like a brother!”

“Ah, Monsieur,” he says again, “I am loafer, waster—what you like—for all that [bitterly] pov-

erty is my only crime. If I were rich, should I not be simply veree original, 'ighly respected, with soul above commerce, traveling to see the world? And that young girl, would she not be 'that charming ladee,' 'vereel chic, you know?' And the old Tims, good, old-fashioned gentleman, drinking his liquor well. Eh, bien!—what are we now? Dark beasts, despised by all. That is life, Monsieur."

Strange, disquieting words, these, when you come to think of them—disquieting with the naked truth!

The poor little flower girl had been taken after act two, when her young husband refused to receive her back, into an institution by the vicar. In act three she had begun her life on the streets. "She wanted the joy of life—she chose the life of joy—not quite the same thing!" says the philosophical tramp. She overhears some of the tramp's bitter words, and tries to drown herself. But the policeman, who admits she were better off dead, saves her. Sobbing on the old artist's shoulder, she says the people at the institution where she was placed looked at her as if they wanted her dead. "I couldn't stop there, you know."

"Too cooped up, eh?" says the artist.

"Yes. No life at all, it wasn't—not after sellin' flowers. I'd rather be doin' what I am!"

Terrible words again!—though the audience is prone to laugh at them.

Then she is carried off to the station-house, to be tried for the crime of trying to kill herself, by a magistrate who believes that there is no hope for her, and she'd be much better off dead. Even the vicar has admitted his belief in the “lethal chamber” as her happiest resting place. The poor, simple-minded old artist cannot see the logic in all this—you grasp how simple-minded he is? Only the vagabond rises to the occasion.

“Do not grieve, Monsieur,” he says, “this will give her courage. There is nothing that gives more courage than to see the irony of things.”

The irony of things—that is the play. Under its wit (for it is witty) and its comedy (for it is full of comic situations), runs the undercurrent of irony, the irony of our poor, feeble institutions to deal with so individual and wild a thing as the human soul. The irony is not lessened by the fact that the only person in the play who reaches the hearts of these waifs is the poor pigeon, whose love for them is regarded as an amiable weakness by everybody else.

Of course, there is one great point which Galsworthy has here ignored. There are men, thank God, and women, too, whose love is no less than the

old artist's, who have his weakness, too, but who have in addition a power of character to inject into other souls something of their own faith and strength. The Salvation Army understands this, and sends men and women among the "rotters," who very often cause a "new birth" in these folk, a mighty welling up of strength from subconscious depths, a faith which gives them the joy of life they crave, and the steadfastness they need. Galsworthy, of course, is absolutely right that this cannot be done by institutions or baths, that such souls can only be reached by personalities who love them and who, above all, sympathetically understand them. But it is not true that such souls are only loved and understood by men and women in whom sympathy is a weakness, and that the only persons who really want them to live are persons who do not know how to give them something to live for.

The present writer knows today a business man in America who has handled dozens of cases of men and women in worse plight than these waifs in "The Pigeon," and made them all good members of society. He loved them. They knew it, and loved and trusted him. He let them pluck him, too, if they wanted to. But very soon they didn't want to, because he inspired in each a new conception of the

joy of life. He did not chain them. He simply substituted for an old motive a new and better one. In some cases it took him months, or even years. But he did it, and is doing it every day. It is this constructive side of love and sympathy Mr. Galsworthy ignores.

But, none the less, "The Pigeon" touches not the conventional stuff of the drama, but real life; to see it is to feel that you have enlarged your human experience. It is bitter with irony, yet tender with sympathy, and lambent with humor. And it is here acted with exquisite and understanding art. No season can be called vain which has given us the Little Theater and "The Pigeon."

BERNSTEIN AND BELASCO AT THEIR BEST

“The Secret”—Belasco Theater, December 23, 1913

Our younger actresses seem to be growing ambitious. Miss Barrymore has apparently joined the ranks of the serious artists now, and Miss Elsie Ferguson, by her performance in “The Strange Woman,” has proved that her ambition to play Rosalind is not to be taken lightly. Miss Billie Burke has just appeared in a serious drama by Somerset Maugham. And, finally, Miss Frances Starr has essayed the most difficult rôle of her career, that of the leading figure in Henri Bernstein’s latest play, “The Secret,” beautifully produced by Mr. Belasco. It is a rôle almost totally devoid of the traditional “sympathy,” for it is that of a cross between Iago and Hedda Gabler; and it is set in a play as remarkable for its absence of the usual Gallic sex appeal as it is remarkable for its superb craftsmanship and its suspensive march. Probably it will not be popular, therefore. It is “unpleasant” without

being salacious, and truthful without being "sympathetic." To hope that it will succeed because it is a splendid play, splendidly acted, is a feat of optimism the facts of our theater hardly warrant. Nevertheless, it is one of the most important productions of the season, and if it does not succeed we should count it a double misfortune, because when Mr. Belasco does apply his genius as a stage manager to worthy material he should be given every encouragement.

The most striking feature of the play, perhaps, is the technical method of the author. In the first act he shows us Gabrielle Jannelot and her husband Constant living in a beautiful apartment in Paris, a most respectable, happy and likable couple, with several good friends, one of them being a young widow (who had been unhappily married) named Henriette and another being a curious, shy, sensitive little man named Denis le Guern. The Jannelots are anxious to bring about a match between these two, and can not understand why Denis does not propose. This is made clear when Denis has an interview with Gabrielle. He explains to her that he has a torturing imagination, which he knows would cause him to be very jealous of a woman whose past he did not share, and therefore he has always determined to

marry a young girl with no past. Yet, alas, he has fallen in love with Henriette. Gabrielle assures him that Henriette was never happy with her husband, and has had no other affair. Thus reassured, he determines to propose. Then we see Gabrielle warn her friend that she should confess to Denis a serious affair she had, just after her husband's death, with a certain Charlie Ponta Tulli, who, we gather, was rather a rake, and jilted Henriette.

Henriette, however, does not confess. She realizes that if she does Denis will not propose. Nobody knows her secret but herself, Charlie and Gabrielle, and Gabrielle, her best friend, of course will not tell. She accepts Denis. After the happy pair have departed, Gabrielle blurts out the secret to her husband, and with great relish is telling him the details of her friend's love affair as the first curtain descends. We begin to see the claws, but we cannot guess the motive.

Act two shows a house party, at which the guests are Gabrielle and her husband, Henriette and Denis, now married, and the mysterious Charlie. Of course, his presence is quite terrible for poor Henriette, the more as he takes a bitter pleasure in making a fool of her trusting, commonplace little husband at every turn. It seems at first as if Charlie's

presence there were an inevitable accident, but gradually we learn otherwise. By a series of truly wonderful scenes—wonderful in their interwrought texture and their steady unfolding of surprise after surprise—we come to realize that Gabrielle brought Charlie there, to make her friend miserable, and if possible to betray the truth to her husband. We learn that Charlie is not the rounder we had supposed, but had been truly in love with Henriette, had fully intended to marry her, and had always supposed she broke off with him because she was tired of him, whereas she broke off because Gabrielle had intercepted his letters, and she had supposed he was tired of her, had regarded her only as a mistress and was abandoning her. By the time the end of the act is reached, we see that Gabrielle has deliberately made a horrible mess of all the lives about her, wantonly done all in her power to wreck the happiness of her best friends, even of her husband, for a break between him and his sister is of her doing, also.

But still we have no motive.

Bernstein, even more here than in "The Thief," saves his major revelation till the end. It comes in the last act. Gabrielle has done it all because she cannot stand seeing those around her happy, unless she is causing their happiness. She is an exagger-

ated specimen of a well known if not common type, exaggerated, of course, to the point where she is practically diseased, but perhaps no less interesting on that account. She has made the breach between her husband and his sister merely because she came home one day and saw them sitting happily together, getting on very nicely without her. She smashed the love affair between Charlie and Henriette not because Henriette, being miserable and lonely after her unhappy marriage, had been rash enough to become Charlie's mistress until such a time as they could marry, and so had offended Gabrielle's moral sense, but simply because Henriette was finding happiness in this relation, not of Gabrielle's making. And when Henriette was finally married to Denis, and at last happy once more in the protection of a good man, in spite of her friend's efforts to prevent the marriage by a confession, Gabrielle brought Charlie to the house party and sowed suspicion with the devilish craft of an Iago.

All this she tells to her husband in a weeping confession, saying that she could not help it, that she fought it, that her better nature revolted and gave her hours of misery. But we are a little suspicious of this last statement, and she does not win sympathy. Our sympathy all goes to her stricken hus-

band, who realizes after twelve years of happy marriage that he has loved a shadow, and that hereafter he must protect and try to cure one morally sick to death.

He behaves very well at the end, and so do the rest, especially Charlie, who goes quietly away when he knows the truth, and leaves the woman he has loved and her husband to work out their salvation on a new basis of understanding.

Such is "The Secret." To all theatergoers who accept an author's subject matter for what it is worth, whether it happens to be personally pleasant or unpleasant to them, and who rejoice in fine craftsmanship and dramatic style, this play will bring unalloyed delight. To the mass of theatergoers, perhaps, who, after all, are incapable of a detached point of view toward any work of art, it may prove caviare.

It is acted up to the hilt by the majority of the company, and it is staged by Mr. Belasco better than any translated French drama has been staged in America, save Simone's production of "The Return from Jerusalem," in many, many years. Miss Starr, of course, is not authoritative in the emotional stress of the final act. She is never likely to be. But in the earlier acts, in spite of her propensity to climb all

over the furniture like a playful kitten, she is a sweet, charming little woman with hidden claws that more and more creep out from the velvet and scratch. The finest performance, however, is given by Frank Reicher as Denis, the shy little husband, who has a little man's pathetic dignity and consciousness of commonplaceness, who has a super-sensitive imagination, but who never loses our respect, who is always at bottom a gentleman, with all that implies. Mr. Reicher, with not much external aid from the author in filling in the part, yet contrives to make a distinct and vivid character creation of Denis. A sister of Martha Hedman, Miss Marguerite Leslie, plays Henriette excellently, and without any of her sister's foreign accent.

But the real triumph of the production, aside from its unity of key and life-like smoothness, is the pronunciation of the French names and terms. Every player speaks them correctly. In an American production of a Gallic drama, this is little short of miraculous. The two interior settings are models of beauty and good taste. Mr. Belasco has here applied his genius to material worth while, and the result is an evening of keenest enjoyment.

MAUDE ADAMS AS A MURDERESS

“*The Legend of Leonora*”—*Empire Theater*,
January 5, 1914

J. M. Barrie’s latest play is making a lot of trouble just now. Miss Maude Adams is playing it at the Empire Theater, hence the trouble. If she were not playing it, the perplexed souls would stay at home with *The Outlook* or *The Cosmopolitan*, and then they wouldn’t be perplexed. That’s the way they did when “Little Mary” was produced at the Empire Theater some years ago. Of course, as a result, “Little Mary” failed. But the circulation of *The Cosmopolitan* is still going up, no doubt.

However, Miss Maude Adams is acting “The Legend of Leonora,” so her admirers (and they are legion), of course feel called upon to go to the theater. Poor things! What they behold is enough to turn the hair gray. “Peter Pan” was pretty hard to swallow, but, of course, the children liked it, and one has to sacrifice something for the children. But not even a child could make head or tail out of “The Legend of Leonora.” It is very sad.

Yet this play starts off innocently enough. Captain Rattray, R. N., just home in England after years of remote exploration, is invited to dinner by an old friend, who tells him six or seven women will be there, and, without naming them, runs over their characteristics. One has too little humor; one has too much; one is a clinging vine; one a suffragette, who gets angry if you pick up anything she drops (and she's always dropping things); one is just a mother; one a hopeless coquette; finally, one is a murderer. Left alone by his host, a woman guest enters. Which one is she? The captain has learned none of the names. He is left to find out which she is by her actions. It is a scene of delicious comedy, as the reader can fancy, with Barrie as the author. Of course, the poor captain guesses first one and then the other, constantly on the track and off again. He tells a funny story and gets a stare, yet the next moment he himself is being laughed at. He thinks her all mother, only to learn that she tangos till a late hour, and so on.

But at last he learns that she is the murderer. This is something of a shock to him and to the audience. Miss Adams a murderer, indeed! How dare the author do such a thing! But Leonora hastens to explain. She was in a railroad carriage with

her little girl, and a horrid man wouldn't shut the window when she asked him to, so she pushed him out on the track (the train was going at high speed) and shut the window herself. Of course, anybody can realize there was nothing else for her to do, because her little girl had a cold—one of those mean, sniffy colds.

Now, for some utterly unaccountable reason, the average auditor doesn't seem to regard this as a complete justification for murder any more than the astonished captain did. Not even the fact that it was a sniffy cold seems, to the average person, to excuse the deed. Confusion enters the audience's mind at this point. They apparently think they are in for a trial scene *a la* "Madame X." At any rate, they are so flabbergasted that they do not enjoy the closing revelation of this act—which is that there were not to be seven guests at all, but only one. Leonora herself was all those kinds of women. (Of course, what Mr. Barrie is trying in his poor, stupid, blundering way to tell us is that every woman is all those kinds of women, including, no doubt, the murderer, provided her little girl had a sniffy cold and a horrid man wouldn't close the window.)

The next two acts are unique in the English drama. They depict the trial of Leonora for mur-

der, and they are at once as wild a burlesque of courts as was Gilbert's "Trial by Jury," and, at the same time, as warmly human, as mellow, at times as tender, as any of Mr. Barrie's more serious work. Alas! the average admirers of Miss Adams seem to scent the tenderness, but to be completely baffled by the burlesque. The present writer heard one woman declare, with a deep expulsion of breath, "Oh, dear, I wish this play was more probable!"

It would be about as sensible to wish "Engaged" more probable, or "The Mikado," for "The Legend of Leonora" is more Gilbertian than any of Barrie's other plays. Yet it differs from Gilbert's work in this important respect—it uses burlesque not so much for satire, which implies scorn, as a roundabout way of praising what it is not now popular to praise, the "old-fashioned woman."

To Barrie the old-fashioned woman is just woman, and she includes the new and the old, a creature infinite and lovely, who can vote if she wishes, bless her, and rear children, and flirt, and go into business, and always triumphantly overthrow man and his poor, logical systems by her potent weapon of charm—what, in an earlier play, he called "that damned charm." If Barrie chooses to say all this by means of quaint burlesque, why not? What is more

delightful than good burlesque, just for its own sake? And when it is burlesque with such a purpose added, to some of us it becomes doubly delightful.

But, alas, to others it seems to become doubly perplexing. It isn't probable. But, for that matter, what is?

Words are quite inadequate to describe the trial scene. A learned judge sits high aloft at the rear. The jury sit along the footlights, their backs to the audience. The prisoner sits at the left, the witness box is to the right. And what goes on reminds you at times of the famous trial of the Knave of Hearts, on the charge of grand larceny, as witnessed by Alice. Leonora is defended by the captain (who, of course, has fallen in love with her, and proposes in open court). She won't keep still. She talks at any and all times. She makes the judge smell her flowers. She pities the crown prosecutor, when a point goes against him. She discusses the culture of delphiniums with one of the jury, and the care of children with another. When she wants tea, the court takes a recess. When she takes the witness chair she promptly says all her lawyer's case is a lie (he had proved she wasn't even in that train), and bases her case on the fact that her little girl had a

cold—a sniffy cold. When the jury retire to deliberate, they send back word that they are lonesome and request that Leonora come and sit with them while they debate. She goes. They promptly return a verdict of not guilty.

All this takes two acts. They are two acts of delicious topsy-turvy, with not a little sly fun poked at British court procedure, and a great deal of implied faith in "that damned charm." To play them effectively, of course, you must have an actress who, herself, has a personality full of charm, a personality which everybody loves, to whose spell everybody yields. There are a score of actresses who could have played Act I of this comedy better than Miss Adams—who, indeed, plays it very badly, for she does not suggest the seven different kinds of a woman at all. But she and she alone could play the court-room scene and deliver its full message. If the play fails with her as Leonora, it can never succeed—which is, indeed, a pity.

The last act doesn't amount to much. It shows the coming of happiness to Leonora (who, by the way, is a widow; perhaps we forgot to state that) and the captain, and gives the puzzled a loophole of escape, by the suggestion that maybe—maybe—Leonora never pushed anybody out of a window, but

was just one of those women capable of doing it for the salvation of her baby.

Personally, we hope this isn't so. We hope she did push him out. It served him jolly well right. The little girl had a cold—a horrid, sniffy cold. We have one just now ourself.

“THE PHANTOM RIVAL” AND MISS CREWS

*“The Phantom Rival”—Belasco Theater,
October 6, 1914*

Ferenc Molnar, Hungarian playwright, was first made known to America when two versions of his play, “The Devil,” were acted here some seven years ago, one by George Arliss and one by Edwin Stevens. “The Devil” did not suggest a dramatist of importance, but “Where Ignorance Is Bliss,” produced last year by Mr. Fiske, though a failure, showed the discerning that Molnar is an artist.

Now Leo Ditrichstein has adapted and Mr. Belasco has produced his play, “The Phantom Rival,” and no one can longer doubt Molnar’s claim to real distinction. “The Phantom Rival” is highly effective theatrically, it is based on an idea, it has charm and wit and subtlety, pith and point and purpose. In short, it has dramatic style. Whenever Belasco applies his great gifts of management to the production of such a play he turns out an entertain-

ment of sheer delight, as in the case of "The Concert." It is only because the same fulsome praises have been showered on his productions of bunkum as on his productions of stage literature that the judicious have come to dread his effect on our theater. "The Phantom Rival," however, can have but one effect—that of splendid stimulation.

Not the least interesting feature of the production is the fact that Mr. Ditrichstein has adapted a play in which his is far from the major part (he does not even act the rôle given generally in Europe to the leading actors), and Mr. Belasco has picked for the major part a woman who has not Billie Burke's kittenish charm nor somebody else's lovely eyelids, but who does possess the ability to act—Miss Laura Hope Crews. For many years Miss Crews has watched other girls of her age go forward into stellar rôles by virtue of this, that, or the other personal attribute which the public liked, while she herself remained, like the late Frank Worthing, a better player in a lesser place. But she has, to a degree possessed by almost no other player of her age on our stage, the technical command of her trade. She still has the charm of youth, too, and she can be as kittenish as the youngest of them. But she can top them all when it comes to real impersonation. And

it was she whom Mr. Belasco selected to play the leading rôle in "The Phantom Rival"—a wise choice, for her performance ranks with Mrs. Campbell's in "Pygmalion"; they are the high points in the season.

The scene of this play opens in a restaurant. An author is talking with an actor. He says that every woman, at the back of her head, carries the memory of her first love, whom she has glorified into an ideal, an ideal by which she measures even her husband. Then Frank Marshall, a middle-aged lawyer, and his young wife Louise come in and sit at another table. They have evidently been quarreling, and they continue to quarrel. He is a bundle of nerves, jealous, irrational, and in Mr. Ditrichstein's adaptation he seems rather harsh and brutal—one of those horrid, nagging husbands. The trouble is, of course, that he is peculiarly a continental type of husband, and doesn't "adapt" well into an American setting. The quarrel grows worse when a man (a foreigner, evidently) enters, whom his wife is startled to see. Marshall makes a scene—he becomes almost a *table d'hôte* Othello. Returning to their home, he drags a confession out of his angry and sore-tried wife that ten years ago she met this Russian in Brooklyn, and he loved her. Yes, he

wrote her a note when he left. No, he didn't kiss her. Yes, the note is in her desk. Did she love him? Did she? Mrs. Marshall, woman-like, does not tell all!

The husband reads the note. It is very juvenile, rather mushy. Sascha Tatischeff will come back, he says, to claim her, when he is either a great soldier or a great diplomat or a great singer. Even if he is a poor tramp he will return. The husband laughs at the note, laughs long and loud. He has been cured of his jealousy. But the wife winces as from a blow. He is making fun of her first love ideal, which is sacred, even from a husband.

They are to go to a ball later that evening, where the husband is to meet a prominent Russian diplomat and put through a traction deal. Mrs. Marshall lies down to rest before dressing, and as she rests she dreams, and in her dream she is at the ball, and first a great soldier comes to claim her, and it is Sascha. Then the great diplomat comes, and it is Sascha. Then a great singer, a tenor, comes, and sings to the guests, and he is Sascha. Then, outside, she meets a poor tramp, and he is Sascha. (In the original it was not a tramp, but a waiter—and such a waiter, the paragon of grace and ease! Molnar kept his play quite free from any sentimental

touch.) Each incarnation of Sascha is glorious in her sight, and with each she promises to flee—and then she wakes screaming, and it is time to dress.

But before they leave for the ball the real Sascha enters. He is a mere secretary to the diplomat, an errand boy. He has almost forgotten Louise. He was in the army, but only in the commissary department. His rich uncle got him that safe berth! He gave up his singing—it was too hard work to practice. He is looking now for a rich wife. He is, in short, a brutal contrast to the hero of the dream. In the original play Louise, disillusioned completely, goes back to her humdrum life and begins ironically to check off a grocery list. In the American version she becomes disillusioned, as it were, regarding her husband, which is a sentimental touch that is out of key with the comedy and illogical, considering the kind of man the husband was. But evidently it was supposed that the other ending would be a bit too cynical for us—and doubtless it would!

Miss Crews plays Louise, the wife, with a skill, a variety, a force and a charm that delight the soul. Dignified and womanly under the torture of her husband's jealousy, she wins absolute conviction for the character, makes us believe this little woman could carry an ideal ten years in her memory, and makes

us sympathize with her dream besides. When the hour of the dream comes Miss Crews rises from her couch and with a strange light in her eyes comes toward the footlights as if groping with a vision, and she sends a shiver down every spinal column in the theater, just as Mansfield used to do; she prepares, with her eyes and a smothered cry or two, for the illusion of the dream, and makes Belasco's task of shifting the actual scene to the dream-gray ball-room comparatively easy. All through the dream she maintains a strange air of passionate unreality; and after the waking, in the last act, when the real Sascha comes and the two talk together, she manages the effect of ever-increasing disillusionment with wonderful skill. There is no pathos about it. A sly sense of humor makes her alive to the ironies of the situation. She is the woman ten years married to another man, with a son asleep in the next room. It is no present happiness that is vanishing, but a fond memory, a lovely dream; the wraith of her girlhood is going wistfully from the room. It is seldom that any player on our stage lays hold so firmly on a character, and at once makes that character live and carries the mere theatrical situations at the same time so triumphantly along. The soul and the mechanics of the drama alike are held every moment

firmly in the grasp of this young woman. Mr. Belasco showed his wisdom in picking her for the part.

Mr. Ditrichstein himself plays the rôle of Sascha. It is not a difficult one, but it offers him, in the dream episode, an opportunity to appear in four different incarnations, and in the first and last acts in yet a fifth. As the soldier lover and as the great diplomat of the dream, he lacks romantic charm and authentic dignity. As the singer, however, he is capital; and as the real Sascha at the close, when he unconsciously smashes Louise's ideal by the disclosure of the more than common clay of which he is made, Mr. Ditrichstein plays with an ironic edge, a deft delicacy, a sense of the picturesque and the subtle, which makes that scene between actor and actress one of the most delightful bits of high comedy acting seen on our stage in many a long day. Mrs. Fiske and George Arliss, Grace George and the late Frank Worthing, or Ferdinand Gottschalk, might give us a similar pleasure in a similar scene. But who else could do it? They are not many, surely. And where would they find such a scene? Plays with the underlying subtlety of psychology of "The Phantom Rival" are not written every day, nor plays with its deftness of development and force of imagination. It is one of the treats of the season.

In the staging of this work Mr. Belasco has indulged in much less than his usual elaboration of details and slowness of minor action. The result is the better for it. There is no less care for surface illusion, of course. Every exit and entrance is managed with the utmost lifelikeness; the waiters in the restaurant are like real waiters; the room in the Marshall house, pretty and tasteful, exactly reflects the sort of woman Mrs. Marshall is, and, moreover, it has that illusive quality of homeliness Mr. Belasco knows so well how to impart and most other directors know so little. The ballroom scene, which is the setting for the dream, on the other hand, is all in gray, with lights half dimmed in white wrappings, and is as simple as it can well be. Probably it would be more effective if it had no reality at all—if it were half a flight of stairs and shadowy curtains—but we do not so stage our plays in America, and Mr. Belasco has done wonders with our conventional type of “realistic” setting.

The one error in the production is the casting of Mr. Marshall, the husband. This part is played by Malcolm Williams, and while he definitely holds to an ideal of the character, it is not in his power to portray the right ideal. He is too large, too forceful, too downright. Not only is this a play of subtle

psychology and real high comedy, but the husband's jealousy must be convincingly the result of strained nerves and a temperament given to brooding. Mr. Williams is not a high comedy actor; he lacks the finish. And he cannot suggest a man given to nerves and brooding. Therefore his scenes with Miss Crews suggest the constant clash of conflicting keys in a duet; they are not playing on the same plane—one is acting on the high comedy level, the other somewhere below it. And, moreover, Mr. Williams, by his inability to suggest the frazzled nerves and the self-torture of a man genuinely given to brooding, loses sympathy for the husband. He becomes a brute. His wife ought to hate him. You can't understand how she could ever have married such a man, even without her first love memory as a deterrent.

But perhaps it is too much to ask for perfection.

BARKER BRINGS THE NEW STAGE CRAFT

“Androcles and the Lion”—Wallack’s Theater,
January 27, 1915

Granville Barker, playwright, actor, and manager, a man of strong original talent and in sympathy with radical experiments in stage craft, has begun an American season at Wallack’s Theatre, with a production of Shaw’s “Androcles and the Lion” preceded by Anatole France’s “The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife.”

There was a great hue and cry raised, when Barker announced his coming, by American actors who said that in these hard times the American stage should be for goods made in America, by Americans. But such talk is silly. The American dramatists and the American actors deserve patronage only in proportion to their merits, and if Barker can give us something better, why, they will either have to go into the movies or else find work at other occupations. That is a law of nature, as well as of art.

And Barker did give us something decidedly better. He gave us, for a start off, two fascinating plays, beautifully mounted and acted according to the picturesque and suggestive style of the new stage-craft.

The first thing he did on taking possession of Wallack's theater was to build the stage out over the orchestra pit and the first two rows of seats, with entrances made through the former stage boxes. At the front of this almost Shakespearean platform stage were neither footlights nor rail. People in the front row of seats could literally touch the feet of the actors when they came to the edge. The next thing he did was to install arc lamps for illumination, combined with white spots from the balconies. Thus all the light comes from overhead, and is as nearly pure white as possible. The next thing he did was to build a small revolving stage twenty feet back of the proscenium opening, for use in "Androcles and the Lion."

"Androcles and the Lion" is a screamingly funny skit on the early Christian martyrs, by G. B. Shaw, which shocked the British public, and will not shock us in the least. It was printed in full in *Everybody's Magazine* last September. The first scene shows Androcles and his wife in the jungle, where

Androcles finds the lion and removes the thorn from its paw, in a scene of hilarious mirth. For this act an entirely conventional double curtain, of green, ragged strips, is let down just inside the proscenium, to represent the jungle, and all action takes place on the platform stage over what was once the orchestra and rows A and B. For the next scene this curtain goes up, and we see a set of arches just behind, of grayish-white, presumably the walls of Rome. In front of them are the Roman soldiers and the Christian martyrs being led to the city. All groupings and colored costumes make striking pictures against this background of simple shadowed arches.

Next the arches vanish, and we see the full stage set, the gladiators' room in the Coliseum, with the grated door leading to the arena in the center, and over it the door to Cæsar's box. This set goes across the stage and is painted a yellowish white, like old marble. It is very thick and solid, but very simple. The wings are masked out on either side merely by tall gray screens, after Gordon Craig. Those who have read the play will remember that after the scene in this room Androcles goes through the door into the arena to be devoured by the lion, and in the next scene we see him coming out of the door on the other side, and see the lion recognize him and begin

to kiss him instead of eating him, much to Cæsar's amazement. Then the scene changes back into the gladiators' room, and the lion comes in with Androcles and chases everybody, including the emperor himself. Thus we see the reason for Mr. Barker's revolving stage. The scene is built so that the back side shows the reverse of the door and the wall and the emperor's box; and when the first episode is played, and Androcles starts through the door to his martyrdom, the lights go out, the stage revolves in less than a minute, and when the lights flash on we see Androcles coming through the other side of the door. The illusion is perfect, and the time consumed in making the change so very brief that it does not delay the play at all. The same thing is repeated while the audience is still rocking with laughter over the absurd antics of the lion when he recognizes the man who pulled the thorn from his foot.

The advantages of Mr. Barker's settings are many. First of all, there is the intimacy which the platform stage gives. Next, there is the pictorial quality of the simple backings, the overhead white light and the consequent prominence of the costumes and groupings. Finally, there is the great advantage of speed gained by the revolving stage and the

great solidity which this stage makes possible in the construction of the one wall which comprises the whole Coliseum setting. A single bit of wall, heavily built, solid, picturesque, is far more suggestive than acres of flapping canvas. Also, it throws the actors into far more prominence, for it does not distract the eye to a hundred different details, and it forms a plain background against which the rich costumes can group in lovely combinations. On our old stages this skit would be played in five scenes, with consequent waits, totaling at least half an hour. Barker plays it practically as a one-act drama.

Of course, these settings would avail little without intelligent acting and a play adapted to such treatment. But Mr. Shaw's skit is entirely adapted to such treatment, being fantastic in mood and far removed from the present in time. And Mr. Barker's company acts it to the hilt—without any star performers, even though his wife, Lillah McCarthy, is featured on the program—and with a speed and zest and team play that is beyond praise. One has only to note, for instance, how every player considers his position with relation to the groupings, the stage pictures, not the spotlight. If there is a star performer, it is Phil Dwyer as the lion. More comical and expressive roars were never emitted by

human nor feline throat. The part of Androcles is delightfully played by O. P. Heggie, in a mild, wistful, long suffering, early-Christian-martyr vein, with the necessary hint beneath of dogged will and a dream triumphant.

“Androcles and the Lion” is preceded by “The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife,” a farce translated by Professor Curtis Hidden Page from the French of Anatole France. It is not, however, a piece of subtle irony like “Thais” or “Penguin Island,” but apparently a very frank imitation of those old French farces which used to be written when Columbus was discovering America, such as the famous “Master Pierre Patelin.” Mr. Barker has given it a Reinhardt setting designed by an American artist, Robert E. Jones—a setting in black and white on the style of the relief stage, with costumes in heavy reds and oranges and strong yellows. Even so, however, appreciation of the play can hardly come without an historical sense. It tells the tale of a man who had a dumb wife, got a famous doctor to restore her voice, and then was driven so nearly mad by her prattle that he had the same doctor put a powder in his ear to make him deaf. This tale is so childish in its humor that you can enjoy it only by regarding it not as a modern work, but

as a medieval farce. The stage settings, however, and the costume groupings and the street processions passing across the platform stage over the very heads of the front row of spectators are a delight to the senses, whether you are interested in history or not.

A FEW MORALIZINGS FROM "THE WEAVERS"

*"The Weavers"—Garden Theater, December 14,
1915*

The present dramatic critic of the *New York Tribune* (we say "present" because *The Tribune* seems to believe that variety is the spice of criticism) is a young man, and when he witnessed the first American performance of Hauptmann's play, "The Weavers," acted at the Garden Theatre by Emanuel Reicher and an excellent company, his enthusiasm did him credit. He said next morning that the production might very possibly mark an epoch in the American theatre. We only wish that we were ten years younger ourself, and had therefore escaped ten years of theatrical disillusionment, and could agree with him. But we are not ten years younger, and we have not escaped disillusionment. The American stage will go right on much as if Mr. Reicher had never mounted "The Weavers." That play will no more affect the current of our drama than

the Russian novelists have affected the art of Robert W. Chambers and Gene Stratton Porter.

Nor is "The Weavers" the first play of the kind which has been produced, and well produced, in America. To be sure, it was written over twenty years ago and belongs among the pioneer works of sheer naturalism in the theatre, but it never had a production on our English speaking stage (so far as the records show) till this month. In actual production it was preceded by several other purely naturalistic plays, notable among them being Galsworthy's "Strife," also, curiously enough, a drama of industrial conflict. "Strife" was put on, and put on with rare skill, at the New Theatre, and played by the New Theatre company in various parts of the country. But does anybody venture to affirm that "Strife" has marked an epoch in our playhouse? Has the naturalistic drama made any perceptible strides among us as a result? Alas, nary a stride!

Personally, we felt at the first production of "Strife" exactly what Mr. Broun of *The Tribune* felt at the first production of "The Weavers"—namely, a great sense of mental exhilaration, a sense that at last the stage was showing something more than the eternal battle of sex and the eternal personal narrative; that it was illuminating a whole

section of life and creeping very close to realities. We fancy we even wrote, in our enthusiasm, that the production of "Strife," an English naturalistic play, would perhaps mark an epoch in the history of our playhouses.

And Cohan goes marching on. Megrue is to the front. Ethel Barrymore plays "Emma McChesney." Grace George falls back upon revivals. Elsie Ferguson turns to Hall Caine for a new play.

Nothing could be farther from our wish than to detract one jot from Mr. Broun's enthusiasm, or even to suggest that he desist from his efforts to urge all New Yorkers into the Garden Theatre to see a vivid and truthful performance of a truly splendid play, a play in which naturalism is raised to eloquence and sincerity is more soul-searching than sentiment. Every audience that "The Weavers" can reach is so much gained. But the sad fact remains, we fear, that the naturalistic drama is foreign to American taste and understanding, and each production of it marks not an epoch but an "impossible loyalty"—one of those impossible loyalties, perhaps, which caused Matthew Arnold to think so tenderly of Oxford. A certain type of artist, a certain type of critic, a certain very limited section of the public, will always admire this kind of drama above all

others, at least in certain moods. But for the great majority it will, apparently, remain, in America, caviar; which is to say, an expensive luxury.

Who can say why this is? Is it because of something in the national temperament? Is it because of our dramatic training—for audiences are trained, just as much as artists? Is it a racial convention, or a racial limitation?

Think back over the American dramas coincident with "*The Weavers*" (which was produced first in 1893). At about that time Herne wrote "*Shore Acres*," which was considered a great step forward in realism. But how far that play is from the naturalism of "*The Weavers*"! One, after all, is a conventional narrative of personalities, the other is a picture of a people, a class, a community. Since Herne, we have had Fitch, Gillette, Klein, Moody, Thomas, Eugene Walter, Edward Sheldon, Percy MacKaye, and so on—not a one of them really being more than superficially affected by naturalism. Better technique, closer observation, greater intellectuality, enabled some of these men to write much finer plays than their American predecessors. But none of them has produced a play in the style of "*The Weavers*," or of "*Strife*," or even attempted such a play. Each, in his way, has snatched a bit

of personal story out of the web of life, usually, if not invariably, a story of sex, or greatly involving sex, heightened it by every possible device, and set it before us in the terms of the conventional drama. There is less sign today of a naturalistic drama in America than there was when Walter wrote "The Easiest Way." Possibly, also, there is less of such drama in Germany than when Hauptmann wrote "The Weavers."

There is, however, one fact to be considered which probably has a decided bearing on the case. Except in some happy land where all theatregoers enjoy their drama seriously, the great majority of people go to the playhouse in a holiday mood. This is especially true of America. When people enter the playhouse in a holiday mood it almost invariably follows that they will, first of all, prefer comedy, and, secondly, that if they are pleased by more tense or serious drama, it will be drama with a strong story interest, with the elemental "punch," with the power to arouse sympathy in the concrete fate of human characters. The naturalistic drama, taking life, as it does, without beginning and leaving it without an end, asking as it does of an audience that they draw their own conclusions from the mere spectacle of observed reality, has a peculiarly intellectual em-

phasis, and is inevitably the chosen drama of the few rather than the many—probably even in Germany. Moreover, the naturalistic drama, by the very laws of its being, is a local affair primarily. Scribe and Sardou go into any language, in any land. “The Weavers” is Teutonic, and could no more be adapted than you could adapt a photograph of von Hindenberg or turn Pilsener beer into Rheims champagne. The truer it is to its artistic type, the truer it is to some definite people or locality.

For these reasons, it seems fairly obvious that under the conditions of production in the American theatre there is little chance or encouragement for a native naturalistic drama. Our plays here have to be produced for a long run—that is, for the masses, not the few; and they have to be produced for Broadway, which, we fear, isn’t much interested in the minutiae of life in New England or the Tennessee mountains. In spite of the tentative and still amateur efforts to establish local theatres in America—provincial theatres in the true sense—they are still efforts with no real effect on the current of our drama. At best they are only hopeful signs on the low eastern horizon. We still produce for Broadway, and we still produce not for theatres where there is a system flexible enough to let the

few have their plays as well as the many, but for theatres where only the drama which can attract the crowds has any chance for survival.

In other words, even if there were a demand for a native naturalistic drama in America, this demand cannot, under present conditions, make itself felt, and there is no encouragement to authors to try their hand at this perhaps the most difficult of dramatic forms. Such statements are rather platitudinous, but it seems worth while to reiterate them. All those who enjoy such a play as "The Weavers," who would like to see our stage attempt the creation of similar dramas, must fix firmly in their heads and hearts the idea that our stage never can attempt this creation till it is conducted under a different system; until there are standard provincial repertory houses. And such houses must not be amateur "Little" theatres, but professional and of man's estate. The problem, after all, is a practical one. A dramatist can no more create a play without the physical means than a painter can paint without colors and brushes.

A TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRAGEDY

“Justice”—Candler Theater, April 3, 1916

John Galsworthy's play, "Justice," one of the most striking examples of the modern naturalistic drama, was first produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on February 21, 1910. It created a profound impression in England, but for six years it remained neglected by American professional managers, though there were occasional amateur performances. Finally Mr. John D. Williams, after the formation of the theatrical firm of Corey, Williams and Riter, resolved to make trial of this noble work. Selecting a cast of exceptional excellence, directed by B. Iden Payne, Mr. Williams and his partners produced "Justice" in New Haven, on March 2, 1916. Several representatives of New York theatres were present on that occasion, and as a result of their highly developed powers of observation, seven New York theatres refused to give the production house room on Broadway. Curiously enough, however, Mr. Williams still had faith

in Galsworthy's drama, and ultimately he found a theatre in our metropolis which was willing "to take a chance on gloom." Accordingly, "*Justice*" opened at the Candler Theatre, New York, on April 3. It only remains to add that its success was immediate and decisive; in a very few days it was playing to the capacity of the theatre.

We record this bit of theatrical history because it so well illustrates not only the obstacles which confront a manager bent on doing fine and serious things, but also the ready response to genuine sincerity and power which is latent always in the public, even the public of New York. Nor, perhaps, can one wholly blame the theatre managers who refused to book "*Justice*." They had all seen three of Galsworthy's other plays produced in New York without causing a ripple of public enthusiasm, and here was a fourth far more tragic and unrelieved than the others. It didn't look like a hopeful gamble, after all.

Why was it, then, that "*Justice*" became a great popular success, when "*The Silver Box*" was a failure, and "*Strife*" and "*The Pigeon*" attracted only moderate audiences? Why should a stark tragedy succeed, and a comparative comedy like "*The Pigeon*" remain caviare to the general?

The answer probably is that in "Justice" Galsworthy's still white flame of spiritual sympathy has for once set fire to the curtains of his reserve, and he has burst into a blaze of passion. It may seem curious to some to speak of "Justice" as passionate. But in the finer sense of that noble and abused word, it glows with a white heat of passion. Beside it, "The Silver Box" is comparatively cold; beside it "Strife," with its ironic vicious circle, so that the play ends where it began, and "The Pigeon," with its wistful inconclusiveness, are emotionally indefinite. "Justice," after all, takes sides, it gets somewhere, and tugs at our hearts in the process. Nobody has ever questioned, or could question, the sincerity of Galsworthy's sympathies for the outcast, the unfortunate, the oppressed, in any of his works. But in his efforts to be fair, to keep his judgments cool, and, furthermore, to preserve the balance of life in all situations—a purely technical problem of the realist—he has in his dramas, at least, often erred on the side of restraint. He has seemed not enough to take sides, or not enough to drive for a definite conclusion. It is an error the dramatist cannot make, and hope for a wide audience. It is a mistake he has not made in "Justice."

Yet this play has no hero, and no villain, or,

rather, it makes of every man and woman in the audience the villain. The young clerk Falder (very graphically and truly played by John Barrymore) obeys a primitive instinct of self-preservation and the preservation of the woman he loves, when he raises his employer's check as the only means of securing money. But he also no less surely breaks one of society's necessary safe-guarding laws, and society (which is you and I and all the audience) has agreed that for our self-preservation we must put such offenders away. So far, so good. But after some thousands of years, the best place we have supplied for the segregation of the law-breakers is Sing Sing prison and its ilk. (Mr. Thomas Mott Osborne pointed out to the Drama League, by the way, that the cell of an English prison, represented in "Justice," was a "palace" compared to the cells in Sing-Sing.) Mr. Galsworthy doesn't believe that society should rest content with such a solution. He doesn't believe that society should take one of its weak members (a man, mind you, who was not base nor brutal, who was ironically obeying one of the best impulses of his life—to save the woman he loved from vile persecution, when he obeyed one of the worst) and put him through the prison mill and then turn him out branded and doomed. All Gals-

worthy's fairness of temper and skill in preserving the cross purposes, the checks and balances of actual life, are seen in his handling of the first two acts of this play—the arrest and trial of Falder. The lad goes to prison with our pity, but he goes, we feel, rightly.

But in the last two acts the author can at last take sides. He has no defence for our present prison system, and no need to place any checks upon our passionate sympathy for poor Falder after his release, as the weak, helpless, branded creature struggles and dies in the net that has been woven about him. Here the author's own passion of sympathy glows at white heat, and here is the secret of the great success of "Justice."

Before a play of such profound and searching social implications as this, the critic is loath to speak of literary or technical excellencies. The power of the drama, as acted in the theatre, over the emotions of all beholders is sufficient commentary on its workmanship and presentation. But it is not amiss to point out at this season—the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death—that the realistic tragedy of the early Twentieth Century differs far more radically than in mere literary form from the poetic tragedy of the early Seventeenth. It has been said that Shakes-

peare never wrote a play with a hero, and the statement is true. Neither has "Justice" a hero. But Shakespeare never wrote a play in which the audience was the villain, which looked beyond the individual to the mass. By his very act in making us the villain of "Justice" Galsworthy tacitly recognizes a curative possibility in society itself; he removes the blame from a vague Omnipotence and by placing it on our shoulders bids us gird our loins with hope and courage. It is hard sometimes in this year of our Lord, 1916, to catch even the faintest hint of that "far off, divine event" toward which the whole Creation is supposed to be moving. Yet, to the present writer, Galsworthy's "Justice" is a precious gleam in the darkness.

We hold to this in spite of the fact that the State of New York is even now proposing to repeat in a new structure the terrible cell-block system of Sing Sing prison.

SECTION III
SHAKESPEAREAN REVIVALS

ON FINDING THE JOKE IN “OTHELLO”

*Faversham's “Othello”—Lyric Theater,
February 9, 1916*

William Faversham played Iago exclusively during the opening week of his brief New York engagement. He had promised us “Romeo and Juliet” with “futurist” scenery, but was forced to abandon the plan, as he found the production as yet too rough for submission to the metropolitan public. He promises to improve it and launch it again next year. His production of “Othello” is not “futurist.” It follows, scenically, the beaten track, though with certain modifications of lighting and increased simplicity due to the influence of the new stagecraft. Of its kind, it is a very handsome production, however, one of the best we have seen. Where his “Othello” differs from tradition is chiefly in Mr. Faversham's own impersonation of Iago, and the consequent hue that gives to the entire play. It is a novel, refreshing, stimulating impersonation, and it gives the drama a new vitality, a new holding

power. We think this ambitious actor has never done anything better.

The keynote of his Iago is humor. Unquestionably, it sounds rather startling, this suggestion of humor in relation to one of the grimdest and most relentless of tragedies. But, after all, perhaps it is even more tragic to murder your wife at the instigation of a humorist than a solemn plotter. Othello was made quite as unhappy, and Desdemona was no less surely slaughtered. We have, besides, the bard's own authority that a man may smile and smile and be a villain.

Every actor, however, must be conceded the right to visualize a character for himself. Mr. Fawcett said recently, to the writer: "I have always seen Iago as a humorist. I have never been able to conceive of him in any other way. Tradition may declare that he should be made a Machiavellian plotter, a subtle, sinister creature; but I could never see him so. In the first place, it always seemed to me that if he had been such a person, everybody would have seen through him, even the honest, stupid Moor. He couldn't have continued to fool them all, to hold the title of 'the honest Iago.' He succeeded in his villainies, it always seemed to me, because he was gay, humorous, light-hearted, you

might say dashing. I will confess that I've always read 'Othello' with a smile. It seemed to me full of comedy. Moreover, Iago was an Italian—an Italian of the Renaissance. You've only to read Cellini to realize something of the lack of conscience in the gay days of the period. I have an idea that my Iago is really more truly Italian than most of the Iagos of tradition, whatever else may be said for or against it."

Mr. Faversham might also have added, we fancy, that he realized certain of his own limitations (for every personality has its limitations), and knew that he could play Iago more effectively as a gay blade of the Renaissance than as such a sinister creature as we can fancy George Arliss making him, or such a creature of darting, insinuating evil as Booth made him. At any rate, he has chosen a definite conception of the character, and he has stuck to it. The justification, after all, is the effect achieved.

That effect is vivid and admirable. The play, indeed, as Mr. Faversham says it seems to him, seems to the audience oddly sprightly. Iago, in contrast to the slow, rather ponderous Moor, is a creation Othello might well have failed to understand. How could anyone so gay and gracious be of evil mind? It is small wonder Othello did not

see through him. The audience does not see through him for two acts, at least. It is only gradually that we, out front, realize the evil of the man, begin to get a clear conception of the character Mr. Faversham is painting. He takes his own diabolical wickedness so lightly! And yet, as we see that wickedness working, as we behold the terrible results on others, it is no less wicked, no less horrible, in its tragic effect. This Iago engages us, wins our interest, almost charms us; as he must have done Othello, or the plot falls through. But we are no more sorry to see his final fate than if he were played like the villain of melodrama. It is an impersonation which makes for tragedy without being itself tragic, certainly without being theatrical. And it is more Italian than any Iago the present writer has ever seen. It is graceful, picturesque, fluent, cavalier—a figure from the Renaissance.

The result of such an Iago, as we have said, is to make the whole drama seem curiously sprightly, until, of course, the final momentum has been gathered and we are rushing toward the end. There can be no question but this is an advantage with a modern audience. To tragedy undiluted, especially in verse, we are not attuned. When Shakespeare can be thus “modernized” (to employ a perhaps mean-

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ingless phrase!) without doing violence to his essential message, there can be no reasonable objection.

Mr. Faversham's stage direction, as well as his Iago, has contributed to this end. The action never grows dull, never fails to bite. Each episode is carefully handled for the full dramatic effect, not slurred over to hurry on to the next virtuoso passage for the star. Cassio (well played by Pedro de Cordoba) enacts his drunken scene, for example, with as much realism as if he were G. M. Cohan in Act I of "Broadway Jones." The scene is fully "worked out." The result of such staging is that the whole drama seems more alive, more vital. Vitality, the power to hold the attention, are the greatest merits, perhaps, of this production.

R. D. MacLean plays Othello, and plays him with a certain slow-witted dignity which is an excellent foil to Iago's sprightliness. Mr. MacLean has real personal distinction, a glorious voice (especially when he isn't forcing it), a feeling for verse, and a rare power of phrasing verse in such a way that the sense is colloquial, while the sound is sheer music—that is, it is plausible human speech and poetry at the same time. His chief lack is a certain distinction of enunciation, hard to define. He does not mispronounce, but, none the less, his speech misses

the fine beauty of Forbes-Robertson's. Miss Loftus is rather a colorless Desdemona (which is possibly not unfitting). Miss Constance Collier, however, as Emilia, supplies color for them both. We have spoken already of Mr. De Cordoba's excellent Cassio. This actor was at the New Theater. The New Theater may have failed, but it is noticeable that all the young players in its company have gained greatly by those two years of repertory.

MISS ANGLIN AND THE BARD

Spring, 1914

If the ancient theatrical saw were true, that "Shakespeare spells ruin," a composite picture of a group of our leading players at the end of the current season would closely resemble a photograph of Pompeii. It is doubtful if even in the "palmy days" (whenever they were) Shakespeare was so frequently acted as in America during the winter of 1913-14. It has been often said that Germany sees more Shakespeare in a season than England almost in a decade; but this cannot be affirmed at present of the United States and Canada.

During the season now closing, Sothern and Marlowe, Margaret Anglin, William Faversham, Robert B. Mantell, and the Benson Company have been presenting Shakespearean dramas almost exclusively, and Forbes-Robertson has been devoting half his repertoire to them, with his "Hamlet" probably the most popular performance now on our stage. If we give each company an average season of thirty

weeks, eight performances a week, and add one hundred and twenty performances for Forbes-Robertson, we find that there will have been one thousand three hundred and twenty performances of Shakespeare in the United States and Canada during the season just closing, without including a great many scattered productions by stock companies, and possibly some by actors of lesser note. The number of plays performed was nearly a score.

Shakespeare may spell ruin, but there appear to be a great many players and managers eager for destruction! Also, Germany may lead England in the number of its Shakespearean productions, but it will have to hustle to keep up with North America. Without much question, the total number of such productions on this continent during the current theatrical year will be close to two thousand. The figures are interesting, and they will come as an awful blow to the melancholy Jaqueses of criticism, who periodically wail the passing of the Bard of Avon.

There are several reasons for this widespread presentation of Shakespeare's plays, over and above the fundamental reason that they are, all things considered, the best plays ever written. For one thing, they have been played so long, and by so many dis-

tinguished actors, that they have become a standard test of histrionic ability, and hence a challenge to all ambitious artists. The actor who essays *Hamlet* invites comparison at once with Garrick and Booth and Forbes-Robertson—with the greatest of his profession. Not only is he attempting a part which calls for all the charm, all the depth, all the vocal skill which he can command (and probably a great deal more), and which richly repays his successful accomplishment; but he is deliberately inviting the severest of comparisons—comparisons which by their very severity palliate his failure and immensely heighten his success. To the ambition of the actor, Shakespeare is a perpetual allure.

Again, Shakespeare is an object of veneration to the public, and a topic of study in all our schools. There is always a large number of people who will go to see his dramas acted almost as a matter of principle, and to them the actor or actress who mounts these dramas gains in dignity, is more highly thought of. Indeed, there was a time, and not so long ago, (nor has it entirely passed yet), when many good people would admit that an actor was respectable only when he played Shakespeare! Similarly, because Shakespeare is studied in the schools, there is a perpetually renewed audience of

young people for his plays, everywhere. It is renewed each year, in fact. No other dramatist has so sure a body of auditors, nor one which awards so much credit to the actor. Those players and managers clever enough to realize this fact have seen that Shakespeare, far from spelling ruin, is a capital investment.

Then, too, of course the Shakespearean plays offer almost endless possibilities (as well as perplexities) of stagecraft, scene-painting, costuming, lighting. Saturated as they are with poetry, glimmering with romance or gloomed with tragedy, they give unlimited scope to the imaginative producer. Written in many scenes, for a stage practically bare, it is almost impossible to play them now in their entirety unless we either revert to the bare stage again or, like the Germans, build stages which revolve or sink, making the innumerable changes practicable. But they are all the more a challenge, then, to the modern producer. He wants to see how much of the text he can preserve. He wants to see how far he can simplify his scenery, still keeping it illusive, or else how far he can make his stage pictures live up to the demands of the poetry. He knows the material he is to illustrate is the greatest in the world, and if any plays can inspire him, these can. To him,

no less than to the actors, they are a challenge and a spur.

These things considered then, it is small wonder, after all, that Shakespeare flourishes on our stage and ambitious players desire to act his dramas (dramas which have the additional merit on the road of familiarity, so that the suffering public can know beforehand what they are going to see). This year William Faversham has placed two more Shakespearean rôles to his credit—Iago and Romeo—and is now presenting “Romeo and Juliet” and “Othello” in addition to “Julius Cæsar.” Following his example, Miss Margaret Anglin (who, like him, was once a member of the Empire Theater Stock Company) has now joined the classic ranks and in a single season, by labors which might well stagger a player of the stronger sex, has achieved a repertoire of four Shakespearean dramas and, moreover, has mounted them according to the newer stagecraft. Her achievement is truly remarkable, and the toil involved must have been tremendous. Probably no manager would ever have undertaken it for her. But her reward will surely be great, also, for she will now occupy a position of dignity and leadership which nothing else could have brought her.

Margaret Anglin was born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1876. Her father was speaker of the House of Commons, and her brother is now Chief Justice. Needless to say, her family were not theatrical. But she early faced her personal destiny, which doubtless required some courage, and went to New York to study for the stage. She made her first professional appearance in 1894, as Madeline West in "Shenandoah," and presently joined the company of James O'Neill, where she played many parts, including Ophelia. Later she played Rosalind in her native Canada. It was in 1898 that a set of curious chances made her the Roxane in Mansfield's production of "Cyrano de Bergerac," and her New York reputation began. She became the popular leading woman of the Empire Theater Company, where her Mrs. Dane in "Mrs. Dane's Defense" attracted wide attention and seemed to doom her to a career of "emotional" rôles. Even her performance in "The Great Divide" but deepened the popular impression.

But Miss Anglin went to Australia, and tried out her ripened powers in Shakespeare there. She came back to America and played a little comedy part in "Green Stockings," by way of contrast to a performance of Sophocles's "Electra" at the Greek the-

ater of the University of California. Then she cut loose from managers altogether, took up the reins of her own destiny and early last autumn, in the West, she produced "The Taming of the Shrew," "Twelfth Night," "As You Like it," and "Antony and Cleopatra," with scenery and costumes designed by Livingston Platt, in strong contrast to the usual hackneyed settings. She was the stage manager for all these plays, as well as the leading player; and she brought this large and exacting repertoire back across Canada to the Eastern seaboard last winter, in triumph. The mere physical feat is impressive. We think Miss Anglin is entitled to a vote!

The present writer saw all four productions in as many days, in Montreal. At that time Miss Anglin herself was best as Katherine in "The Taming of the Shrew," and the entire production of that irrepressible farce was in the most consistently sustained key —a key of high spirits, innocent mirth, and blithe romance. In Eric Blind, Miss Anglin had a Petruchio of rare physical charm, unflagging good nature, and underlying tenderness. His chief fault is a lack of vocal nimbleness and variety. She herself is the best Shrew since Ada Rehan (who was never Shakespeare's Shrew, but a very wonderful person, none the less). She is brilliantly vitriolic, edged

like a saber, and she is properly and convincingly subdued, but only after a tussle that kindles the blood. She is not so regal and magnificent as Miss Rehan, but, unless our memory is at fault, she possesses a certain tart humanity the elder actress lacked.

In staging the play, she followed the usual custom of omitting the Induction, which is always regrettable.

The acting of "Twelfth Night" by Miss Anglin will probably cause some quarrel. She evidently hasn't a very high opinion of Viola. There are others, to be sure, who think of Viola as rather colorless, at any rate as lacking in initiative and dash; but it has been the custom to play her with more gusto than Miss Anglin permits herself. We fancy that the actress, in her desire to differentiate between Viola and Rosalind, those two heroines in trousers, tones down the former into a meekness the play did not intend—for, after all, it is a frolic. But her impersonation is deliberate, and she does what she sets out to do, though here, again, she falls sometimes into the error of sentimentalizing the verse, instead of letting the beauty of it tell its own story by the clearest and simplest of readings. "She never told her love—," as spoken by Julia Marlowe

was a speech of marvelous and touching felicity and pathos. Miss Anglin misses the lyric felicity, and not a little of the pathos. Perhaps, after all, the satisfactory impersonation of Viola comes down, in the end, to a question of personality.

Miss Anglin's Rosalind can probably be imagined by those familiar with her acting in lighter parts in the modern drama. Rosalind has a certain executive directness (she was, after all, Mr. Shaw's *Ann* three hundred years in advance of her times), and a gay humor and self-confident poise which Miss Anglin must find congenial. She gives every evidence that she does, at any rate, and her charm, her high spirits, her beauty, are infectious.

Miss Anglin's least successful performance was of Cleopatra—oddly enough the most emotional rôle of the four. We fancy that she herself is least satisfied with it, and probably will not hazard it in New York till she has further developed it.* Her performance at present is based on a conception of Egypt's queen which hardly squares with the popular idea. When all is said, Cleopatra was the supreme harlot, and so far as the play is a love tragedy, it is the tragedy of harlotry—though glorified by im-

* Miss Anglin presented only "As You Like It," and "The Taming of the Shrew" in New York, at the Hudson Theatre, in March, 1914.

mortal verse and pageantry with armies and with empires. Miss Anglin, however, does not so play it. She keeps her vision fixed on Cleopatra, the queen, and a certain haste and hectic heat, a certain race of passion which is plainly enough indicated in the mad alternations of the queen's moods and which in reality makes the tragedy a swift one, are lacking from her performance—so lacking that the tragedy becomes slow. The queen is as long a-dying as poor Tristan in the opera, and Miss Anglin falls frequently into an error which we would never have predicted—the error of intoning verse, the ancient trick of "elocution." Alas, we fear there is truth in the saying that no lady can play Cleopatra!

The settings and costumes for all of Miss Anglin's productions were made by Livingston Platt, an American artist who studied abroad, and on his return made his first designs for the amateur Toy Theater in Boston, and then for John Craig's stock company in the same city. Because his settings are in themselves lovely, but still more because their employment by Miss Anglin marks the first attempt on a considerable scale to apply the newer stage-craft to Shakespearean production in this country, a somewhat extended discussion of them in this place seems worth while.

The key to his scheme is found in the fore-stage. Some six or eight feet back of the proscenium, on either side, are hung negative, plain brown draperies. Between them and the proscenium are thrust out two entrance doorways, solidly built, one on either side. Each play has its own set of doorways, and its own border, running across above. For "The Taming of the Shrew" and "Twelfth Night" these entrances are Italian, for "As You Like It" nondescript, for "Antony and Cleopatra" heavy and columnar. Similarly, the four connecting borders are painted in the corresponding architectural styles.

Now, for every "front scene" a drop is lowered just behind these fore-stage doors, boxed in by the doors, the brown hangings and the appropriate border. For Italian rooms, the drops are large tapestries, for outdoor sets sometimes a mere picture, sometimes a double drop showing a landscape over a wall, or through an entrance. The two proscenium doors seem part of the proscenium arch in the outside scenes and do not destroy illusion; and for the interiors they aid illusion. They are extremely effective. But their chief merit lies in this—while the "front scene" is being played in a really illusive setting, so that it does not seem like a makeshift, the large full scene to follow is always being put in

place, and consequently there are no waits. Scene follows scene, act follows act, with great speed, but without the old-fashioned effect of makeshift settings for alternate scenes. In reality, it is a glorified version of the scheme so common in the old-time melodrama.

When the drop rises behind the fore-stage the full set is not only framed by the proscenium, but it is matted, as it were, by the architectural entrances, the brown hangings, the border. It is still further confined, set off, by a framework exactly in its own mood and period. Set a Greek scene directly behind the rococo *l'art nouveau* of the New Amsterdam proscenium, for example, and the contrast is ridiculously sharp. But with Mr. Platt's scheme the eye is led in past the theater proscenium, which is forgotten before the real picture is reached.

As for those pictures, they are, for the most part, extremely simple. Compared with a setting of Shakespeare by Irving or Tree, or even Mr. Sothern, they are sometimes a mere nothing. Yet they are illusive and lovely, and several of them are genuine works of art quite by themselves, pictures the eye dwells on with pleasure, pictures which fire the imagination, which at last live up to the magic of the verse.

Such will be the duke's palace in "Twelfth Night" when Miss Anglin gets to a theater with a modern lighting plant (if one exists in America). It is utterly simple—nothing on the stage but a couch, and behind that three gracefully arched windows letting out on southern landscape with poplars afar off. The color and lights are all—a pearly room, sunlight streaming in through the windows, the red robes of the duke upon his couch, a flash of gold, and then the gray of Viola. No foots, of course, should be used here, though they had to be in Montreal. The light should all stream in from the rear. A similar room, better lighted, made the last scene of "The Shrew." Here the light fell on the glass of the banquet table, on a heap of yellow fruit, on the rich Italian costumes of the courtiers, and it was so bright, so colorful, so beautifully composed, that it might almost have been a Paul Veronese painting come to life. Again, in "Twelfth Night," we are shown a scene at the palace consisting entirely of a narrow back drop, not twenty feet wide, on which is painted a garden shrine at the end of a poplar alley, and which is flanked by great brown curtains. On the stage is a couch, a tiny table, a small fountain of exotic design, not over two feet high. There is nothing else, not even a wing piece. Yet, in

Montreal, the audience applauded this set as the curtain rose! It is simplified scenery with a vengeance, yet pictorially beautiful and entirely satisfying.

But it is in "Antony and Cleopatra" that Mr. Platt has done his best work. His Roman scenes are for the most part set on half stage and made by hangings and a few Roman benches. They are, of course, chiefly tents. A bit of wall with a drop behind is Antony's garden. Behind them the great, towering yellow screens, out of which Mr. Platt builds his dream of Egypt, are set up and left undisturbed.

Here again in his full sets he uses no wing pieces and no sky borders. The screens (which by a simple short panel set at right angles on either edge look tremendously solid) both block the sides and tower up suggestively out of sight, making sky borders needless. They are shifted, as Craig shifted his in the Moscow "Hamlet," to make either Cleopatra's palace or the interior of her monument, though it must not be supposed that with Mr. Platt the screens are all. He also employs realistic furniture and sections of scenery and painted drops. Pale yellowish brown, like aged stone, they rear aloft in the monument interior with a ghostly, dim blue radiance in dagger blades between them, and amid the

shadows at their base the figures mysteriously come and go, the reds and greens and purples of their robes like dragon flies in the dusk. In the monument set the sides are boxed in, with a window on the right admitting a blue radiance, and at the rear two yellow walls, eight feet high, nearly meeting at a flight of steps in the center. Dim incense burners flicker at the feet of two gods upon these walls, and at the base of them the red robe of Charmian is like a splotch of blood. Cleopatra dies in the blue radiance from the window, and the purple robe thrown over Antony's body is like spilled wine. Out of the mystery at the base of the towering screens comes Cæsar in scarlet and looks upon the scene.

But even more imaginative and simpler is the setting for Cleopatra's palace roof, where the queen receives her first messenger, which Miss Anglin makes the first scene of Act II. Here there is absolutely nothing on the stage but a dim, towering screen at either side to mask the wings, a low wall nearly across the back, made by laying one screen on edge, a higher section of wall on the right, whereon reclines a figure in black silhouette, and beyond that the night sky. The illusion of height and of desert sand below and far off an unseen horizon is extraordinary. Cleopatra sits on the wall and the

moonlight makes strange pools of color with her robes and jewels. Mardian, the eunuch, shines ebony in the silver illumination, and his gestures are those of an Egyptian relief. The silhouette raises up on its elbows and emits a long-drawn, startling cry, answered from far off and far below by the hail of the messenger. The scene, of course, depends chiefly on the electrician, for the actual settings are ridiculously simple and can be put in place in forty-eight seconds—three or four screens, with no furniture whatever. Yet the audiences applaud it instinctively. It is marvelously lovely. It drips with the hot Egyptian night, it carries the beholder at once up on the roof top above the desert plains.

Curiously enough, Mr. Platt has been least successful with "*As You Like It*," the most romantic of the plays. Here he has no architectural features to work with or to use as wing screens, and, being without a semi-circular horizon or sufficient height of fly gallery for unscreened drops (height cannot be depended on in provincial cities, and much of Mr. Platt's scenery had to be cut down for the road), he has had to resort in his forest sets to the clumsy expedients of tradition, such as woodland wing pieces and foliage lowered on a tennis net to "solid" tree trunks above papier maché mossy stones. But

at least he has avoided stage grass and paper flowers! Perhaps his forests will be better when they can be lighted, as he intended, from above. But it seems to be a fact that the outdoor set is more difficult for the new impressionists to manage than the interior or partially outdoor. They have not yet solved the problem in any production the present writer has seen save in the case of a desert plain or other absolutely waste space to a low, distant horizon.

However, the total impression of these four productions is one of great beauty, poetic illusion, and eminent fitness. Furthermore, Miss Anglin has preserved a goodly proportion of the texts, and still contrived to close the plays at a decent hour. She and Mr. Platt have demonstrated that it is quite possible, then, to mount Shakespeare with adequate scenery and without long waits or textual slaughter, even on the American stage, handicapped as it is by lack of mechanical equipment. They both deserve our gratitude.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOLD FAIRIES?

*“A Midsummer Night’s Dream”—Wallack’s
Theater, February 16, 1914*

Granville Barker has now mounted “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” at Wallack’s Theater, and shown us, perhaps, the most unusual of all his productions. It will alternate with “Androcles and the Lion” throughout the season, other plays being added to the repertory later. It is amusing to see the confusion which has resulted. The poor New York public, totally unused to repertory since Mansfield died, can’t get it through their silly heads that if a new play has been put on, the old one hasn’t been withdrawn.

There are two outstanding features of Mr. Barker’s production of Shakespeare’s musical comedy. The first is the fact that the method of staging permits the entire text to be played without a single cut, so that for the first time in the present writer’s experience the story emerges as a coherent, clear and swiftly moving tale. This always does happen

when a Shakespearean play is acted without cuts. The bard knew his business. He didn't write scenes merely for the fun of it; he wrote them to further his story. The only proper way to stage Shakespeare is the way which permits the use of the entire text.

Hitherto it was supposed this could only be accomplished on a bare stage, or else one which was equipped with elaborate mechanical devices, such as are found in Germany. Mr. Barker, without resorting to Reinhardt's revolving stage, and without stripping down to the bare boards, either, has solved the problem.

The second outstanding feature of his production (which was "decorated" by Norman Wilkinson) is its incessant, bizarre, pictorial appeal. The eye is constantly surprised, constantly delighted, and though many of the settings are so different from any Shakespearean settings we have been accustomed to that they rather disturb the conventional-minded, nevertheless before the play is over they have established their own mood and even if this mood isn't what we have been accustomed to call Elizabethan, it is at least so potent that the play takes on a new lease of life. You leave the theater a bit bewildered, but admitting that, after all, you never knew

before that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" could be such an interesting play.

When the audience gathers in the theater, it sees the forestage (built out as far as old Row C), bathed in white light, and hanging just inside the proscenium, framed by a second proscenium of plain gold, like a box, a curtain of whitish color, with a frail green and gold floral design upon it. Just in front is a black seat, on a slightly raised platform. As trumpets sound, four negro slaves enter, by the passage made by the elimination of the stage box, and they are followed by Theseus, Hippolyta and the court. The costumes are not the traditional Greek, but are full of barbaric color, which is perhaps more nearly authentic. The duke and his lady seat themselves on the black seat, and the play begins. Just as the entrance has to be made with a certain amount of pageantry and music, so the stage has to be cleared in the same way. For the next scene, all that is required is the raising of the curtain. Six inches behind it is another curtain, painted with a quaint, formal representation of a window or two and a glimpse of the city. It is a cloth curtain, hanging in folds. Before this Bottom and his fellows plan their play. Then this curtain also rises, and behind it (it will be seen that so far the real

stage, behind the proscenium, has not been used at all) is a third curtain, painted plain Nile green on the bottom edge, and above that deep blue, spangled all over with silver stars and a huge moon. The light is dimmed down, and the fairies enter.

The fairies are the most bizarre things in the entire production. They are entirely clad in gold, with gold faces, gold hands, gold hair hanging in gold curls like shavings from a new yellow board. They are undeniably strange and at once differentiated from anything mortal. It may very well be questioned if they are the fairies of Shakespeare's vision. They are not ethereal, but solid as gilt statues, and stiff like statues, too, moving with quaint, automatic motions. It is to them that most of the objection will come. Yet they are undeniably tremendously picturesque and undeniably they do give the desired effect of difference. Perhaps, when we consider how few productions of this play have ever been able to create the mood of the supernatural, these stiff gold fairies are better than the more conventional representations, even if they do rather orientalize a purely Elizabethan play. Only Puck is not in gold. He is clad in bright scarlet, with yellow hair streaming back like a comet's tail.

For the next scene the full stage is used at last.

It is a very beautiful and strange set. Filling almost the entire stage is a green mound rising to a dome in the exact center. Above this dome is suspended a quaint ring, or wheel, of purple grapes and leaves. Surrounding it on all three sides are long, upright strips of Nile green cloth, between which you see only an indefinite blueness. They are, presumably, the forest trees. They go up out of sight, and of course all the illumination comes down from above. This is pure suggestion with a vengeance, and it is so lovely and so effective that the audience bursts into applause. Of course, the green mound is Titania's fairy bower, and here most of the remainder of the action in the forest takes place, with the characters vanishing and reappearing amid the towering strips of green cloth.

When the action in the forest is over, the play is practically over, too, and here Mr. Barker makes his long break (there has been but one very brief intermission before). It is long after ten when the last act is begun. Again the full stage is used. The forestage, as always, is bare. From immediately behind the proscenium rises a flight of jet black steps, all across the stage, to a height of six feet or more, and on that elevation stands a forest of round silver columns supporting white crossbeams through which

you glimpse the night sky. Black and silver—that is all. The duke and the lovers and the court recline, Roman fashion, on couches at the very front of the fore-stage, their backs to the audience, and upon the platform, against the black and silver, Bottom and his friends enact their Weber & Fields burlesque. Then all the humans depart, and in come the gold fairies, and to an old Elizabethan air weave a dance amid the forest of silver pillars, blessing the house. One by one they go out, like the candles in the “Farewell Symphony,” till only Puck is left, in his red dress, before a yellow curtain which has descended, in a dim radiance, to speak the epilogue.

The entire production holds the interest without a break, if only for its strangeness. It is played at a tremendously rapid pace, which too often blurs the beauty of the verse; but that is about the only flaw in its accomplishment of its purpose. The costumes are of rare richness in color, and every move of every player brings some fresh pictorial delight, as these costumes group and melt and group again against harmoniously colored backgrounds. All the music is old English, and so are the dances. Mendelssohn has been mercifully abandoned. The acting, too, is excellent. Actors play leading parts who

were almost supers in "Androcles" and vice versa. Mr. Barker has a true stock, or repertory company. But best of all the performances is that of a man named Ernest Cossart as Bottom. He does no mugging. He doesn't try to be funny. He doesn't even try to be uncouth and ugly. He is just vain-glorious and stupid in a most natural, almost quiet way—and consequently he is capital. However, all the actors in the mechanic's drama are unconscious and hence delightfully humorous. This usually dull feature of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—dull because usually so forced and laborious—is in the Barker production one of the most fascinating features.

The production will arouse controversy (which is good for business). But whether it jibes with our preconceived notions or not, there is no denying its unity of effect, its rare pictorial beauty and its power to hold the attention unflaggingly, sending you from the theater with lovely pictures in your memory and a sense of strangeness, as of a dream. After all, what more can you ask?

“THE TEMPEST” WITHOUT SCENERY

“*The Tempest*”—*Century Theater, April 24, 1916*

The Tercentenary celebration of Shakespeare's death was observed in New York by productions of the poet's plays in no less than three manners—not including, of course, the amateur variations! Sir Herbert Tree, at the New Amsterdam, produced “King Henry VIII” after the late Victorian fashion, with operatic pageants and conventionally excellent scenery. At the Criterion Theatre, under the management of James K. Hackett, Richard Ordynski (pupil of Reinhardt) produced “The Merry Wives of Windsor” in the manner of modern Germany. The scenery, heavy and markedly composed into pattern of design and color, was painted by Joseph Urban; and an incessant bustle, a driving pace, a fluid and highly mannered series of forming and melting and reforming tableaux, distinguished this production, giving that sense of “style,” in the Continental use of the term. Finally, at the Century Theatre (formerly the New Theatre), John Corbin

and the actor, Louis Calvert, under the patronage of the Drama Society, put on "The Tempest" in something approximating Elizabethan fashion. The full text is spoken, there are but two intermissions, and the only scenery employed, excepting a few property trees and the like, is disclosed in the little alcove under the Elizabethan balcony at the rear, which serves first as the ship's cabin and later as Prospero's cave.

There could hardly be a better test of Shakespeare's dramatic power. He survives all three methods of treatment, and each brings out something from his work which the other two miss. Tree's production catches the pageantry. Ordynski's production records the speed and pictorial pattern. But the production on the bare stage we ourselves like best of all, for it spurns all other aids and stimuli, and compels the imagination by the sheer power of the actor's art and the poet's verbal magic.

There is a great deal of talk about what Shakespeare would do if he were writing today. "Of course, he would employ scenery," people declare. Therefor, is the implication, let us employ it for him. Undoubtedly he would employ scenery; but he would also employ quite a different technique in the conduct of his story, and he would write in prose.

Should we, therefor, cut his plays to pieces, and reduce his blank verse to common conversation — which is what most of our managers and actors between them actually do? After all, the plays were written for a stage practically bare, and on such a stage they are most effectively performed, just as "*Don Giovanni*" is most effectively performed in a theatre, not an opera house, with a small orchestra and a harpsichord. Also, they are thus most economically performed, and have the maximum of educational value. Mr. Corbin has done a fine work in returning "*The Tempest*" to the stage in its integrity, for the first time, he maintains, in three hundred years. After the Restoration, we know, it was dressed up into a kind of opera, and in these latter years, save for a revival at the hands of Augustin Daly in 1897, it has slept the dusty sleep of the admired classics.

In the present revival, several able actors are concerned. Mr. Calvert plays Prospero with something too little of royal dignity, but with an evident love for the poet's metres. Walter Hampden is the Caliban, and a gruesome, grovelling beast he is. Cecil Yapp is the Trinculo, and George Hassell the Stephano. These two men are artists, Hassell especially being almost unrivalled on our stage as

an unctious low comedian who, at the same time, holds himself in fine restraint and can touch other stops on occasion with ease and deftness. It is unlikely that the comic scenes between Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano have ever been much better played than in the present production. The romance of Ferdinand and Miranda fades a little, at the hands of a tame actress, before this rich, ripe fooling, just as the fairy spell of Ariel evaporates when Fania Marinoff, the Ariel, speaks or sings. Ariel is, perhaps, one of the most difficult parts in Shakespeare, because of the diversity of its requirements. The player must be light of foot as a thistle-down, with the tongue of an angel, the voice of a bird, the elfin charm of a Maude Adams.

The goddesses and nymphs in the masque Mr. Corbin caused to disappear behind a curtain of hissing steam, finding his warrant for so doing in Shakespeare's own stage directions and in his investigations of the Elizabethan theatre. There is no cause to quarrel with him. If a woman plays Miranda, we are already not strictly Elizabethan. A little modern steam may be readily forgiven, supposing it could be proved that Shakespeare didn't employ steam himself. What is here sought is the preservation of the text in its integrity, and the ap-

peal to the imagination through the medium of the poet's verse and story. There is no use denying that in the masque, where an appeal to the eye is frankly made, we miss the richness of the modern stage. But for the rest of the play we miss it not at all. Shakespeare has his way with us, making of bare boards his magic island, of two box trees in a pot his tangled forest, of actors speaking immortal verse his summons into fairy-land. One at least of Shakespeare's plays ought to be produced each year in this simple manner, with the best actors procurable. It is a splendid stimulus to our pampered imaginations.

SECTION IV
PLAYS, PLAYERS, AND ACTING

OUR COMEDY OF BAD MANNERS

1910

There is a class of drama known to those who love to put tags upon everything as the comedy of manners. The term is now little used except to describe the drama of the eighteenth century, Sheridan's "School for Scandal" being the crowning example of the comedy of manners. This particular division of the drama is thus defined in Hennequin's "Art of Playwriting":

"In the comedy of manners especial attention is paid to character drawing, and each character is made the representative of a certain trait or passion. In this way conventional or stock characters are developed, such as the dissipated son, the rich and miserly uncle, the cruel father, the intriguing servant, and so on, which are used over and over again. Comedies of manners are of a quiet and domestic character and deal with the follies of society."

The ordinary mind, contemplating this definition,

is a little perplexed to know why half the comedies it sees to-day are not comedies of manners. At any rate, stock characters are developed which are used over and over again. And the ordinary mind, perhaps, contemplating the American stage, is inspired to wonder if, even within the strict limits of this definition, we are not developing a comedy of bad manners.

One of the early types developed for stage use to symbolize the American was *Asa Trenchard*, in the Englishman, Tom Taylor's, play, "Our American Cousin," a comedy afterward rechristened "Lord Dundreary," and acted for many years by the elder Sothern. *Asa Trenchard* was an uncouth lout, let us trust in reality never typical at all. But he flourished in drama till W. J. Florence acted *Bardwell Slote* and John T. Raymond acted Mark Twain's *Mulberry Sellers*. The manners of these stage characters were little better, though they were vastly more entertaining. Their more recent successors are *Joshua Whitcomb* (kindly and sweet old grandfather of a loutish brood of by-goshing stage children) and *Daniel Voorhees Pike* in "The Man from Home." With all his differences, *Daniel Voorhees Pike* is the legitimate stage descendant of *Asa Trenchard*; he is simply the latter-day example

of the type labeled "an American" in our comedy of bad manners.

But we are rapidly developing another type labeled "an American" which seriously threatens the preëminence of the old. This type is being developed by the younger playwrights, headed, perhaps, by that peerless leader, George M. Cohan. It is most often urban instead of rural, but even more than the old, the new drama which displays the type is our comedy of bad manners. These bad manners are not peculiar to our drama; they permeate our fiction also. Mr. Cohan's skillful and amusing play, "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," is made from a story said to have been enormously popular in a magazine which affirms a circulation equal to half the population of the original thirteen colonies. This new type is a brisk, resourceful, humorous, slangy young person, fresh in every sense of the word, always of low- or middle-class origin, without any manners but bad ones, quick-witted but superficial, devoid of fine breeding, distinction, charm. He overruns our stage just now. The plays of Edgar Selwyn, of George M. Cohan, of James Forbes, of George Ade, of Henry W. Blossom, and of many others, give him a field for his activities. Always he triumphs. Always he is the hero. Al-

ways he is the type "an American," the new type in our comedy of bad manners.

There is something veracious about him, too. One meets him on the street—on Broadway, at any rate. One sees him at the races and ball games. He is loafing round the post office after supper in our smaller towns. There are some of us, to be sure, who would rather see him educated than dramatized. But his mother wit is shrewd and amusing, "he has good stuff in him," as the saying goes; and dramatized he has been, manners and all. And to play him a race of actors has been developed whose "personalities" seem to fit the demands of this character. His manners are reproduced to the life. Grace and distinction of bearing and deportment have become almost a lost art with many, if not most, of our younger actors. Our comedy of bad manners is no longer the narrow definition of a certain kind of play; it is a description of much that goes on upon our stage.

All of us who care for the amenities of life, who esteem correct deportment in its proper place, who are charmed by grace and distinction and hurt by its absence from plays where it belongs, have suffered only too often from the prevalent bad manners of the American theatre. For these bad

manners, of course, the type of drama we have just described is not alone responsible, though its popularity has undoubtedly tended to encourage the more flippant side of the players and to discourage the assiduous cultivation of correct deportment, of good manners. Our present stage managers are a contributory cause. They do not—and too many of them cannot—instruct the players in carriage and deportment, nor insist upon correct speech and graceful bearing. The producing managers, also, are to blame, because, in the first place, most of them mount more plays than can possibly be produced with proper attention and rehearsal, and in the second place because they are themselves too often quite blind to the charm of good manners and the value of distinction. Finally—and in the last analysis chiefly—we, the public, are to blame, because we ourselves place too little emphasis on charm and distinction in our judgment of the players (as in our judgment of our fellow men), esteeming some too highly who lack these graces, esteeming the few who possess them not enough, and in general showing too little vigorous insistence in our drama on a final note of style, of elegance, of good breeding.

A popular actress, herself a woman of unques-

tioned breeding and distinction, whose plays invariably call for a touch of the same qualities in others of the company, particularly in the leading man, recently complained to the present writer that it was almost impossible to secure an American actor any longer who could qualify in this important respect. She mentioned Bruce McRae and Charles Cherry as two, of course, whom she would like to secure, but both of whom were elsewhere engaged. Frank Worthing was also otherwise engaged. She was forced to send to England for a leading man. Both Mr. Cherry and Mr. McRae, it might be remarked, may be claimed more by England than America.

Charles Cherry and Bruce McRae (who is a nephew of that most polished and delightful of gentlemen and actors, Sir Charles Wyndham), neither of them actors of any considerable range or power, are, indeed, capital examples of what too many of our players are not. They have the charm and grace of bearing which come from familiarity with the usages of good society; they have the ease of gentlemen and the distinction of culture. If either of them were called upon to portray a man of the polite world, he would not come out on the stage, as one of our prominent players actually did

a few seasons ago, wearing a pink waistcoat with his evening dress. He would not, as so many of our actors do, affect the latest ultra-fads of the Broadway tailors—one button to his sack coat, turned-up coat cuffs, and all the rest. He would not stand like a gawk in the presence of ladies, his hands thrusting out like the *Scarecrow's* in the “*The Wizard of Oz.*” He would not sit down before the ladies were seated, nor fail to rise when they enter the room, nor hitch up his trousers above his boot tops, nor talk with the Broadway flat “a” and the Broadway “guerl” for girl and “puerfactly” for perfectly and “minut” to denote a period of sixty seconds. His tone would not be that of a rent collector come on an unpleasant duty, or the gardener making love to the cook. He would, in short, bear himself like a gentleman.

Lester Wallack, himself a prince of deportment on the stage, with that grace and poise and dashing charm of bearing so essential for the true portrayal of romantic rôles, once rebuked an actor at rehearsal for pulling up his trousers when he sat down. “You are playing a gentleman now,” he said, “and you are supposed to have more than one pair of trousers.” The point is not unimportant. Nothing is more ridiculous and fatal to illusion than the

vain actor's preening of his person on the stage, and his middle-class care of his wardrobe in the presence of spectators.

In contrast to such careful attention to the amenities by Lester Wallack, one of our present-day stage managers, who mounts many important plays for a leading firm of producers, permitted a minor actor in a drama translated from the French to throw an entire scene out of key by his total lack of manners. This actor, in the rôle of a jeweler, was supposed to call upon a fine lady, to see about the purchase of her jewels. It was a part of his trade to purchase jewels from fine ladies and to be man of the world enough never to disclose by a hint that he suspected the real cause for the sale. He was supposed to enter almost as a servant, bland, obsequious, polite, deferential. But the stage manager permitted the American actor who essayed the part to enter like a bailiff come to make an eviction. The actress, fighting to create an air of distinction, of breeding, for her part, to create the atmosphere of an old, aristocratic household, was, of course, hopelessly baffled by this performance. The atmosphere evaporated. The last whiff of it went up the chimney when the actor deliberately sat down in her presence, she standing up. Bad manners

could go no further in the destruction of illusion. And this bit of boorish ignorance was sanctioned by a stage manager to whom are entrusted some of our leading productions. The actor, if he did not know any better, should, of course, have been told. It would have been comparatively simple at least to make him remain standing in the lady's presence. Unfortunately, there was nobody with good enough manners to tell him.

In Henry Austin Clapp's "Reminiscences of a Dramatic Critic" is the following sentence:

"I remember hearing it said, at a time near the close of the Great War, by some men who were native here, and to the best Boston manner born, that Edward Everett, A.B., A.M., LL.D., ex-Governor of Massachusetts, ex-United States Senator from Massachusetts, ex-President of Harvard College, ex-Minister to England, littérateur, orator, statesman, was, in respect of distinction of manners, in a class with but one other of his fellow citizens: that other one appeared in the local directory as 'Warren, William, comedian, boards 2 Bulfinch Place.' "

William Warren, comedian, was one of America's greatest actors. He was equally at home in high comedy and low, equally convincing as the fine

gentleman or the country lout, as *Sir Peter Teazle* or *Dogberry*. He could slough off his manners when the part demanded. That is not so difficult. But it is not so easy to put fine manners on, when you do not possess them. With Warren they were as much an instinct as personal cleanliness. He did not acquire them with any thought of their being a stock in trade. But a stock in trade they inevitably were. They raised him to a foremost position on the American stage, because they endowed his high comedy impersonations with a convincing style and an irresistible charm, they gave him the final note of personal distinction.

How many of our players to-day can you recall offhand who can play in high comedy with convincing style and the charm of fine bearing? You think, of course, of Miss Maxine Elliott, of Miss Grace George, of Miss Marlowe, of Mrs. Fiske, of Miss Barrymore and Miss Anglin—all of them practised players, several of them trained in “the old school.” You think of certain other practised players, such as Miss Crosman and Miss Irving. Of the less practised women you think, it may be, of Miss Janet Beecher and of her sister, Miss Olive Wyndham, at the New Theatre, who speaks so beautifully and carries herself so well that you are

inclined to forgive her slim technical equipment for the suggestion of emotions. Perhaps you think, too, of Miss Crystal Herne and two or three more: and then your memory begins to waver. You begin to recall play after play where fine ladies were depicted with every shade of nasal speech, affected pose (our actresses' idea of gentility being a complete absence of naturalness), gawky gesture and uncouth manners. You begin to recall the pain of drawing-rooms peopled with folk totally lacking in distinction, of romantic scenes without charm, without grace, without glamor.

Again, you turn to the men. The case is even worse, for manners come more naturally to the ladies. You think, of course, of Mr. McRae and Mr. Cherry, of Mr. A. E. Matthews, the young English actor now appearing in "The Importance of Being Earnest," of Frank Worthing, of Frank Gillmore, now at the New Theatre, who has played *Romeo* alluringly and the *Prince* in "Such a Little Queen" with a genuine suggestion of royal birth and breeding, of Walter Hampden, of Richard Bennett perhaps, who is a character actor also, of George Nash, who played so beautifully in "The Harvest Moon," and of Mr. Sothern, Mr. Skinner, Mr. Miller. But Mr. Nash, Mr. Sothern, Mr. Skinner

and Mr. Miller belong by rights to an elder school of training. Of course, you can name some others for yourself—and then again your memory begins to waver. The picture comes of white-gloved hands thrusting hugely forth from black sleeves, embarrassed about what to do with themselves, of flip, unmannerly speech, of nasal inflections, mispronunciations, lack of social distinction, of ease and grace and style. You think of a long procession of comedies of bad manners.

It is characteristic of a certain type of jingo "Americanism" to consider good manners as a sign of social snobbishness and to regard personal grace and distinction as a cover for mental and moral sloth, even a cover for the idle rich who ride down Fifth Avenue with lap dogs. This attitude is both a misapprehension of what constitutes good manners and personal distinction, and a gross flattery of those who ride down Fifth Avenue with lap dogs. Good manners are the outward and visible sign of inward and abiding regard for the finer feelings of others. Personal distinction is the result, and can only be the result, of personal familiarity with fine thoughts, fine people, and a beautiful way of living. Because, through ignorance and unfamiliarity with a more finished society, many sturdy American virtues

are found in men and women of uncouth manners, it is by no means logical to infer that those virtues result from the uncouthness, or that the lack of uncouthness implies in all others a lack of the virtues. Yet that illogical inference is exactly what too many of us are prone to make, until, finally, uncouthness, bad manners, a lack of personal distinction, have come somehow to stand as a symbol of our national virtues, and the G. M. Cohan type of "fresh" young man is the hero of our new romance.

You cannot separate the national stage from the national life. As we sow in taste, we reap in drama, so long as the stage is left entirely to the guidance of a strictly commercial management. The inability of our players adequately to perform plays which call for the finer graces of speech and manner, whether native dramas, dramas of the European aristocracy, or comedies and romances of an elder day, results, of course, from lack of proper training and direction; and that lack, in turn, results from the lack of any imperative demand. For the brisk, veracious, slangy, nasal performance of a Cohan farce, running two hundred nights on Broadway to packed houses, and consequently exalting that species of drama and performance as something to be emulated by writers and actors and producers,

we pay by the murderous performance of Bataille's "The Scandal," or of "Decorating Clementine," or of a score of other dramas, native or adapted, realistic or poetic, grave or gay, which imperatively demand for illusion style and distinction of the players.

Now, style and distinction, personal grace and charm of manners, are the very technique of fine living as well as its flower. So far as they are unesteemed and uncultivated in American life, so far is that life crude, deficient. So far as they are absent from the representation of life upon the stage, just so far is the stage crude, deficient. From the realistic depiction of frontier society, of sordidness, of middle-class existence as it is frequently spent, they are properly absent. But this is not the whole of life, even in America. Nor is the realistic depiction of surrounding conditions the whole mission of drama. The highest, as well as the lowest, deserves a place upon the stage: and upon the stage, too, belong the charm of romance, the glitter of high comedy, the sensuous appeal of poetry, of verbal beauty, of sheer esthetic charm.

For these things style and distinction are required. The sparkle of high comedy can be scattered only by lips trained to speak properly, by players trained to ease and grace of pose; the glamour of romance can

be cast only by players of high bearing, personal charm and chivalric manners; verbal beauty may only exert its spell when a love of verbal beauty sits at the speaker's heart; and, in the most realistic depiction of actual life, there can be no truth to our finer-bred and more intellectual society unless we have actors of sufficient culture and worldly wisdom to comport with their parts.

Not only must our stage for its full and rounded development show us the comedy of good manners as well as of bad manners, but by so doing it can exert a considerable influence upon our society. Especially over the minds of the young, the stage has a tremendous influence; in certain quarters of our larger cities it is the supreme influence. Could the stage display more personal distinction, could it put forth the charm of good manners, of style and elegance, could it show the grace of correctly spoken English, it would not, perhaps, so entirely hold the mirror up to American nature (as that nature is expressed in American manners), but it would make American nature more worthy to be mirrored.

How may this result be brought about?

It may be most practically and effectively brought about by the direct influence of more cultivated men in the managerial department of the

playhouse. Fancy the influence, not of one New Theatre, but of a score of playhouses where a score of managers set themselves each a standard, picking and drilling their players to comport with it.

The question reduces itself once again to the statement we have more than once iterated: That the man who essays to become a theatrical manager takes upon himself the responsibilities of a public servant, for what he produces will inevitably influence the public taste for good or evil; that no man can produce above his own level; that his works will have style and distinction only in so far as he possesses those qualities; and, therefore, that a stage which shall exert a steady influence for better taste and better manners must be managed by better men, men who are not of the "common average," but above it. The advent of more such men into the theatrical "business" is earnestly to be desired. We need them quite as much as we need playwrights. May we not look to the newly awakened interest in the practical theatre among our colleges to produce managers as well as authors? Why the management of a fine art should be given over so exclusively as it is to something generally less than the "common average" remains a reproach—and a mystery.

THE REAL FOES OF THE SERIOUS DRAMA

1911

As a new season opens in the playhouse, we might do well to pause and consider our attitude toward the play, for it is our attitude toward the play, quite as much as it is the players or the playwright, which ultimately determines what kind of a drama we shall have.

The real foes of a serious, effective and socially important national drama in America are not the managers, who are glad enough to produce any kind of a play demanded—if somebody will pick it out for them! The real foes are not the frivolous thousands who prefer musical comedy or vaudeville—“tired business men,” drummers, ladies on shopping expeditions, and their like. Such frivolous folk we have always with us, always have had, and always will have. Indeed, the best of us are frivolous now and then, and the man who says he doesn’t like a good musical comedy we regard in very much the

same way as the man who says he doesn't like onions—as a liar. No, the real foes of a serious, effective drama in America, which shall rank as literature on the one hand and as a social force on the other, are the thousands of good men and women—more women than men, unfortunately—whose attitude toward the stage is represented by their reiterated remark in the face of a serious drama, "There's enough unhappiness in the world without showing it on the stage."

The attitude of these people toward the stage is only too apt to be their attitude toward all art; but it is only the theatre which concerns us here. Who are these people? They are not the frivolous, the unintelligent. They are more often than not most serious-minded, and even pursuers of culture at Chautauquan conventions, middle-aged and elderly women, passionate workers in the church, seekers after the salvation of the heathen and their pastor's health, rigorous adherents to the strictest standards of morality—of such are the foes of a serious drama. Men of solid standing in the community, of mature judgment, of high civic ideals—of such are the foes of a serious drama. Younger women, neither frivolous nor unintelligent, but just ordinary girls grown up into the responsibilities of motherhood

with comfortable homes and a wholesome desire for the occasional pleasures of the theatre—of such are the foes of a serious drama. They are its foes because they are the very people who should support it. Instead they, whose attitude toward life is one of sane recognition of its gravity, assume toward the stage an attitude of evasion, and demand of art not honesty and seriousness, but a pretty story which shall ignore the facts of life and take account only of the fictions of romance; which shall, at any rate, if it takes account of the facts of life, select only the pleasant facts.

A preacher in a certain Pennsylvania city once preached a sermon describing the squalors and privations among the mill and factory laborers and their families at the other end of the town. After the service a good lady of his congregation came up to him reproachfully. "Why do you preach such sermons?" she asked. "You have harrowed me all up! I come to church to be spiritually uplifted and soothed."

That, we fear, is the attitude of a great many good ladies, and not a few good men, toward the drama.

We have said that such people are the real foes of a serious national drama, a drama that shall be

literature and shall be of social value, because they are most often the people who, in the community at large, represent the solid element of average intelligence and civic service. They are the ones who support the church, the village improvement society, the Y. M. C. A., the boys' club; who keep their lawns and their children in order; who are, whether rich or poor, the people at whom our patriotic orators proudly point. They are honest in their lives; they are dishonest in their art. They declare that they "want to get away from unpleasant things in the theatre"—and they do not mean that they want vaudeville or musical farce, because they are not the supporters of stage frivolity. They mean that they want drama which is pleasantly romantic, which has no relation to the stern facts of contemporary society. They want, like the good lady in church, to be soothed. Thus the very class of the population which, in the practical matters of life, may be relied upon for support, in the matter of art cannot be relied upon at all. These people do not regard art as a practical matter of life, but as something quite apart from life, and of consequent unimportance. That is their error. Once convince them that art, especially the drama, is of quite as much living and practical importance as Chinese

missions or the minister's salary or the trimming of the sidewalks, and we fancy an astonishing change would come over our stage; there would be a widening and deepening of the scope and appeal of our serious drama, due to the new encouragement and support.

But how convince them? The task sometimes seems hopeless, because there is something perversely illogical in their attitude. We have said they regard art as unimportant. That is not entirely true. They are willing to admit it possesses a practical power for harm, but they cannot see how it can, conversely, possess a practical power for good by treating seriously the serious facts of life. "The Easiest Way," for example, or "Mrs. Warren's Profession"—to name two exceptionally unpleasant plays which the sentiment of these people succeeded in forbidding, one in Boston, one in New York—are not to be tolerated because "no good can come of showing such things on the stage; there's enough of such unhappiness in the world," and our young people "will learn from such plays a great many things they shouldn't know."

Just how far this attitude is inspired by a real regard for our young people, or how far it is in-

spired by an aversion to face the unhappy facts of life when presented in so concrete and vivid terms, is a question we need not go into here. The truth remains that it is not the part of wisdom to adapt all our drama to the young-person, but to pick what plays our young shall go to see. Thus we dispose of the young-person argument.

When we come to the argument that "there's enough unhappiness in the world, and no good can come of depicting it on the stage," we can only answer that so long as there *is* so much unhappiness in the world, it is our duty to keep people reminded of it, by every means in our power, until they are driven to remedy matters. It is a psychological banality that man is roused to action much less readily by indirect than direct stimulus. We read without a shudder of 100,000 Hindoos dying of famine in India. But if a family we know, in our town, should starve, we would cringe with the horror of it. We have read, most of us, of insufficient wages paid to working girls, and the dreadful moral result; but how many of us have been roused to see what remedial steps we, personally, can take? How real an impression has it made upon us? Depict such conditions truthfully on the stage, in the vivid terms of the theatre, let your audience become

absorbed in your story, caught up into the lives of your characters, and you have done the next best thing, for purposes of rousing response, to striking your audience directly through the tragedy of some one near or dear to them. Most Englishmen have never been in prison, and they remained indifferent to the abuses of the English prison system till Mr. Galsworthy's play, "Justice," was produced. There is unhappiness enough in the world, enough and to spare, but Mr. Galsworthy proposed that there should be a little less, so he roused the nation by a drama. That is the good which can come of "putting such things on the stage."

So much for the social side of the serious drama. No less important is the more strictly literary side. No artist who is worthy of the name writes or paints or carves or composes in a constant spirit of levity, or with a disregard of the relations between his work and the facts of nature. Art, for the genuine artist, is not play; it is serious business, the business of recording in coherent and significant form his observations of the world about him and his sense of their drift and significance. No enduring art has ever been created, nor ever will be created, which is not the artist's conscious comment on life; and the highest pleasure which we derive from a work

of art is the pleasure of realizing its truth, expanding our own experience of life by living thus vicariously in an art work, and gaining through the artist's eyes a new sense of beauty or of power. Such art is only created by large-minded and serious men. Such men can only create it when they are unhampered in their choice of subject, when they are permitted to follow their natural bent, write of what interests them, paint what seems to them worth painting. And just so long as the public puts a check on the freedom of the playwright's choice by refusing to enjoy or to patronize plays which are not sweet, romantic fictions, just so long will a true literary drama remain in abeyance, true artists of intellectual power and serious interest in the problems of life turn to other fields of endeavor than the stage.

It is a curious fact that the older generation especially, which mourns a decline of Shakespeare from the stage (though, as a matter of fact, Shakespeare is still played more often than any other dramatist), which sighs for the good old days of Booth and Forrest, for the days when the drama was "sweet" and "wholesome," forget, or cannot comprehend, that the old order changeth, and that our "unpleasant" realistic plays of to-day are the

modern counterpart of the elder tragedies in which Booth and Forrest thundered.

No good can possibly come of reviving "Virginius" to-day, because the theatregoers of to-day don't want "Virginius"—it bores them. Since our modern drama is intimate and realistic, our modern tragedies must be intimate and realistic, and their subject matter must be what is tragic in modern life. If the good souls who once accepted "Virginius" but now reject "The Easiest Way" or "Mid-Channel" would only pause to consider the question fairly, they would see that the only reason why "Virginius" isn't as unhappy and unpleasant as the modern plays is because it is a story of ancient Rome instead of modern New York or London—it is 2,000 years in the past. We fancy that the lust of Appius Claudius is no more "pleasant" a thing to contemplate, *per se*, than that of the broker in "The Easiest Way" or of the husband in Brieux's play, "The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont." We fancy that certain physical facts are quite as frankly suggested by "Virginius" (or "The Winter's Tale," for that matter, or "Othello") as by the modern plays of Pinero and Shaw. But the difference is that girls to-day are not in danger of seduction by Appius Claudius; a great many of them are exposed

to the perils of the Tenderloin of New York, to the perils of marriage, of sweatshops and department stores, of idleness and vanity. If we may have the stage depiction of ancient perils passed, by what logic can any theatre-goer deny us the depiction of present perils? There is no logic in it. The fact is that the depiction of ancient perils did not trouble us because they were far away; the modern tragedies "harrow us up," like the preacher's sermon, because they are near to us, and so we do not like them. We are cowards in art. After all, none but the brave deserve a literature.

An inevitable accompaniment of the opposition to serious modern social drama is the argument that by tolerating such plays you will "banish beauty from the stage," murk it o'er with gloom and depression. You will do, of course, nothing of the kind. In the first place, the men of the largest purpose, the finest human sympathy—that is, the men best fitted to write such drama—are very frequently the men also best fitted for comedy, by their very qualities of sympathy. Pinero of "The Thunderbolt" is also the Pinero of "Trelawny of the Wells" and "Sweet Lavendar." Barrie of "The Twelve-Pound Look" is the Barrie of "Peter Pan." It further follows that the qualities required

of an audience to appreciate serious social drama are the very qualities which are required for the appreciation of satire. Still further, the depth and richness of the humor in any literature is most frequently measured by the depth and richness of its serious plays or novels, even when the two are not united in one man, as in a Thackeray or Shakespeare.

The world is not all bad; men love to laugh; other men love to make them laugh; we still have romance, happiness, poetry, and we shall continue to have them. A problem play does not make the world any worse; it strives, indeed, to make the world a little better. Neither J. M. Barrie nor G. M. Cohan is going to stop writing comedies because Pinero and Eugene Walter wrote "Mid-Channel" and "The Easiest Way." When we plead for the encouragement by American audiences of earnest, outspoken, native sociological dramas, we are only pleading for the widening and deepening of our dramatic literature, the enrichment and vitalizing of its appeal. A stage must be universal in its range, it must embrace the grave as well as the gay if it is to class as literature, if it is justly to reflect life, if it is to be of social service in the community.

Once upon a time to a certain sectarian college

came a student from the rural regions. "I want to study for the ministry," he said, "but I don't want to study any subjects which will shake my faith, no science nor anything like that. My faith is grounded on the Rock of the Church, and I propose to keep it there."

The wise Dean replied that if his faith was so insecure that it would not resist honest study, he had better go back to the farm.

Are not those good souls who cannot tolerate serious social drama on the stage "because there is enough unhappiness in the world," much like this prospective parson? Their faith in the ultimate goodness and beauty of the world must be insecure indeed if they cannot face the depiction of its evils on the stage that they may understand those evils better, and, through a better understanding and a wider sympathy, gained by the noble service of Art, move toward the day when there is less "unhappiness" in Life.

GEORGE ARLISS—A STUDY IN ACTING

1912

When Mrs. Fiske first mounted “Becky Sharp” Tyrone Power played the Marquis of Steyne and Maurice Barrymore played—and how he played! —Rawdon Crawley. When she revived the drama a few years later poor Barrymore was dead, and an actor comparatively new to our stage, though his talents were already well recognized, was the Lord Steyne. His name was George Arliss, and his first entrance upon the scene was one of those memorable examples of the actor’s art which, once witnessed, is never forgotten.

Steyne makes his appearance in Act II, coming out on the broad stair-landing above the ball-room and looking down upon the animated scene for a few moments without speaking. No entrance is “worked up” for him, as the players would say. He comes quite unheralded, slipping quietly into the picture. In Mrs. Fiske’s production the ball-room was done in a general color scheme of yellow.

The eyes of the audience during the preceding portion of the act were fixed upon the figures moving animatedly about on the ball-room floor. "There was a sound of revelry by night," a gay atmosphere, nothing sinister nor tragic. But suddenly one or two persons in the audience felt impelled to glance up to the broad stair-landing above. There, silhouetted sharply against the lemon-yellow wall, stood, to their surprise, a new figure in the drama, a smallish figure immaculate in black silk hose and breeches and coat, with a curiously crafty, malicious and domineering face framed between its dark whiskers and over a high white stock. The keen eyes were glancing down upon the bare shoulders of the women. A smile played upon the sensuous lips. But the figure neither moved nor spoke.

Yet this silent figure had riveted the attention of those few persons in the audience. One by one others in the audience felt curiously impelled to look up, and their attention, too, was riveted. Finally the entire audience, forgetful of the persons on the ball-room floor, was looking with something akin to surprised awe at the black-clad, smiling, sinister figure on the landing. When all eyes were fixed upon him, the figure moved. He stepped with the grace of a panther down the stairs, and it was as if

a dark shadow of evil, of tragedy, settled on the gay scene. He walked over to Becky and spoke in a soft, wheedling voice; and it was as if *her* tragedy had met her face to face. The real drama had begun. Then came the cannon of Waterloo.

The actor who, unheralded and in silence, thus imposed a mood on an entire audience (aided, of course, by Mrs. Fiske's wonderful sense of effect in her stage management) was George Arliss. A better illustration could hardly be found of Mr. Arliss's power to bring a character to instant life, and weld it into the drama. His acting, widely appreciated and liberally rewarded, we are glad to say, is one of the finer things of the American stage, and a study of it rewards us with a better understanding of and a greater respect for the whole art of acting.

How, the writer recently asked Mr. Arliss, did he rivet the attention of the audience in "Becky Sharp" before he had spoken a word, even before many in the audience had even guessed what character had entered? His reply was significant. It is much the same reply, in effect, that Duse once made to a similar question. It connects the magic of great acting directly with the mystery of imagination, and ranks the great actor beyond a question as a creative artist.

“I can account for that effect,” said Mr. Arliss, “only by the theory that even before I left my dressing room each night I felt the situation. I felt how like an ominous black shadow of evil the real Lord Steyne must have descended on the scene —incarnate power, the power of wealth, of position, of craftiness and will, all bent on cruel ends. When I came out on the landing that idea possessed my whole imagination. Technically, I think many actors quite underestimate the power of the eye, and perhaps my use of my eyes as I stood on the landing had something to do with the effect. But I cannot avoid the conviction that when the actor himself is caught up into the imaginative life of the character and the scene, then, and then alone, can he, by some mysterious process, communicate a fire to the imaginations of his audience.

“There are times when one feels abominably one’s self on the stage, tremendously healthy, when one’s thoughts will stray to golf or a tramp in the country. And then one feels that heavy atmosphere of the play which envelops you behind the proscenium, or should envelop you if you have the actor’s temperament; dispelled; and just as certain as death or taxes one feels, at the same moment, his audience slipping from him, and hears the restless

cough. That is an excellent reason for having good actors and actresses in the company with you. They help to maintain the atmosphere of illusion not only for the audience but, quite as importantly, for the star or leading players. That is one reason why it is so satisfactory to play with Mrs. Fiske. She lives every moment the life of the play, and in her electric atmosphere your imagination, too, sustains you in the illusion."

Imagination, then, is the life blood of fine acting, as of any of the creative arts. But imagination without training, without technical command of the tools of the trade, is of slight avail. It is because Mr. Arliss combines imagination with a fine and resourceful technique and a broad intelligence, that his art is a model and a standard on our contemporary stage.

How he achieved his technique is a valuable lesson to the younger actors of the day—though, fortunately for us, Mr. Arliss himself is still in his prime. He was born in England in 1868, and first acted in 1887. His first year on the stage was spent in an obscure London stock company "over the water" on the Surrey side (which might be Jersey City or Hoboken)—a company which mounted a new play every week. His second season was

spent with a provincial road company wherein he played twenty leading parts. Those first two seasons, he says, were the most valuable of his career.

During the first year the novice, yet to enter his majority, played a new part every week, all of them small parts; and because they were small parts, and because the company was a cheap one without time for careful stage direction, he was left free to play his parts as he saw fit. One week he was a policeman, one week a clerk, another time a rustic. He could make these characters young or old, as he wished. The young actor, full of ambition, made it his task to study each little part as carefully as he could. If he was to play a London clerk, for example, he watched actual clerks till he found one who seemed, in dress and manner, either to be a type of his class or to represent something that would be effective on the stage. Then Mr. Arliss would go home and design a hat or a collar or a wig or a suit of clothes, or all combined, that he might look, as well as talk and act, like this type from life he had been watching.

“Anything I saw on the streets which I thought effective dramatically I managed to get on to the stage before a fortnight,” Mr. Arliss says. “And what was the result? Sometimes I fear it was, im-

mediately, to upset the balance of the performance, but for me personally it was the finest kind of training. Not only did I skill my eye to observation, but I acquired a whole stock of effects which have remained in the background of my memory, and to this day when I am called on to play this part or that, almost unconsciously these memories come to my aid, and I know what I can achieve and how I can achieve it. The young actor who begins on Broadway with a single part, plays it for two seasons, and then plays a second part for two seasons more, and so on till he is old, will never, save by a miracle, learn to be an actor. He will not learn the tools of his trade."

The next year saw Mr. Arliss, still with a cheap company, touring the provinces. He was now playing leading rôles, however, twenty of them, of all sorts, and experimenting with audiences incessantly. A decade of acting in London followed. Then, in 1901, Mr. Arliss came to America, supporting Mrs. Patrick Campbell. New York first saw him as Cayley Drummle in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and enjoyed the crisp, worldly humor, the polished urbanity, the lurking tenderness of that performance. It next enjoyed him as the Duke of St. Olpherts in "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,"

and felt a touch of his cynical power as well as his polish. Fortunately for us, he did not go back to England to act. David Belasco, who may be relied on to know acting when he sees it, kept him here to play the cruel and crafty old Japanese, Zakkuri, in "*The Darling of the Gods*," a part wherein his powers for sinister suggestion and for sheer physical illusion of "make up" had full scope.

But, equally fortunately for us, Mr. Arliss did not remain with Mr. Belasco. We say fortunately, because Mr. Belasco, with all his marvelous skill as a stage director, is too often enamoured of the merely theatrical drama, and there is too seldom any underlying basis of intellectual or social purpose and truth-seeking in the plays he writes or stages. Mr. Arliss transferred his support to Mrs. Fiske, and with her, at last, he was in company worthy of his finest efforts, and likely to induce them. With her, he truly established himself as a leading actor of our stage, in the best sense of the word.

With Mrs. Fiske he played such diverse rôles as Lord Steyne in "*Becky Sharp*," Judge Brack in "*Hedda Gabler*," Ulric Brendel in "*Rosmersholm*," Raoul Berton in "*Leah Kleschna*," and the old Frenchman in Mrs. Fiske's own one-act play, "*Eyes*

of the Heart." Lord Steyne was a crafty, powerful, distinguished man of the world; Berton in "Leah Kleschna" was a degenerate young French blade. The two parts, wide as the poles, were as widely differentiated by the actor. One was by turns hypocritically suave, worldly, urbane, grim, powerful, not-to-be-denied; and in its physical aspect an astonishing replica of Thackeray's own drawing for the character. The other was juvenile, devil-may-care, and physically, thanks in part to the actor's wonderful use of his legs, arms, and nervous, expressive hands and fingers, almost a study in degeneracy. Still again, his Ibsen characters were no less sharply cut, and carried with them the chill atmosphere of the Old Man of the North.

It was after his seasons with Mrs. Fiske that Mr. Arliss first appeared as a star, not a star created because his "personality" pleased the public, but because he possessed the ripeness of technique, the power of suggestion, the insight and the understanding, to play stellar parts. His first venture was made in the early fall of 1907, in the title rôle of "The Devil," a rather cheap and unimaginative play by an Hungarian, in which the leading actor wore a frock coat over his supposed tail, boots over

his cloven hoofs, and symbolized temptation at the ear of a man and a maid, who, truth to tell, needed no external propulsion to drive them into sin. Another manager put out another Devil at the same time, and the two productions at least served to show how much more subtle, suggestive, polished and imaginative was the art of Mr. Arliss than that of his rival.

From the evil omniscience of the Devil to the childlike simplicity and delicate goodness of Septimus, in a dramatization of Mr. Locke's story, was the wide step Mr. Arliss next chose to take. "Septimus," the drama, fell far short of "Septimus," the novel, and failed. But we had, at least, the opportunity to see that Mr. Arliss's "personality" was not the cause of his success in sinister rôles, since here he no less successfully suggested whimsical childlikeness and goodness of heart. With what minute and careful touches he built up the quaint picture of Septimus the dreamer and eccentric! His delicate fingers, nervously sinister as Steyne or Berton, were here used to suggest the inventor, and the man of gentle ways. When some one departed from the room, he said "Good-bye" after they had gone, as if his wits were but just come back from wool gathering, and in a flash

touched the character to life. And here, in his quiet, perfectly modulated voice, was not the oily craftiness of Steyne, purring over Becky, but gentle wistfulness or humor. His imaginative grasp of the character seemed actually to color his tones.

Finally we are now seeing Mr. Arliss in New York this winter (as Chicago saw him last) in a character different alike from Steyne or Septimus, from Devil or saint, as that brilliant and contradictory historic figure of mid-Victorian England, the Jew, Disraeli, set in a drama by Louis N. Parker. It is a brilliant portrait that Mr. Arliss has painted, one of the true acting achievements of the winter, one of those achievements in character delineation which remind us that large and stirring and vivid acting did not perish with Richard Mansfield, after all.

Considerable nonsense has been printed in the Sunday papers about Mr. Arliss's methods of make up for this part. Considerable nonsense is always being printed in the Sunday papers about one thing or another. According to the papers, Mr. Arliss scurried all over Paris in quest of a wig which might exactly match one worn by "Dizzy" himself. "As a matter of fact," the actor says, "I did what any sensible person would do,—I looked at an authentic

portrait of Disraeli, and then went to a wig maker with my instructions. I had his clothes copied in the same rather obvious and practical manner, after looking at the collection of Disraeli relics in the South Kensington Museum." From which we may infer that Mr. Arliss's art remains free of bunccombe.

"I had always, from my youth, been interested in Disraeli, both as a man and a possible stage figure," he continued, "but when it was assured at last that I was to put him on the stage, I stopped reading about him altogether, and waited till the completed manuscript was in my hands before resuming study. I did this that I might see the character in relation to the actual drama, rather than in relation to history, and so have the squint on it my audiences were bound to have. Once the manuscript was before me, I began to study Dizzy's life and works for the character details that would fit with Mr. Parker's play. That seemed to me the only way in which I could be fair at once to history and to the drama. Doubtless my impersonation, no less than the play, lacks something of historical correctness, but Mr. Parker and I have both tried to interpret for the present the essential spirit of the

man and his period, in a manner that shall still be interesting as acted drama."

Sensible words, these. How nearly Mr. Arliss is like the real Dizzy we fancy the majority of his audiences do not greatly care, nor always realize. Dizzy was something of a fop, we all know, and Mr. Arliss catches this suggestion. But he was a brilliant man besides, with a Shavian gift of epigram, and Mr. Arliss tosses off those epigrams as brilliantly and spontaneously as could be desired. Disraeli, too, was Prime Minister of England, in the face of opposition, and that meant crafty power and iron will behind the suave, dandified ways and the bantering, sharp-edged epigrams. Not the least effective feature of Mr. Arliss's impersonation is his constant suggestion of this power and will, a suggestion made without our being conscious of the method. Merely, he dominates the scene when he is present; he holds the attention just as the striking personality of Disraeli would in life; he brings the spectator under the spell of his eyes and voice. Finally, Disraeli was, with it all, a good bit of a bluff—and knew he was; and a good bit of a humorist, with a warm corner in his heart for his elderly wife; and a good bit of a dreamer, too, who saw an

imperial England with an Oriental's eyes. It is easy to find the suggestion of all these contradictory traits clearly made in Mr. Arliss's portrait, and yet fused into unity, as in the man himself.

The imagination which lies behind such a piece of acting, planning it consistently, guiding it, welding it into the drama without violence to history, is an imagination to respect. The technical skill to make the careful plan plain and potent for the audience, to color the voice, to suggest power, distinction, craftiness, humor, tenderness, in rapid succession, to speak epigrams naturally, not by rote, to inspire something of the dignity of a prime minister and the romance of the Jew, is a technical skill as remarkable as it is rare. Who of our younger actors has such skill? Who has had the training to develop such skill? For, while the actor's imagination is born with him, his technique must be acquired.

Indeed, the actors, young or old, on our stage to-day who can compare with George Arliss, either in imagination or technical proficiency, are few and far between. He represents for us acting in its best estate, an art at once broad and subtle, vivid as life, and truly creative. To miss seeing him is to miss one of the finest pleasures of our contemporary theater.

WHAT IS A GOOD PLAY?

1912

One of the favorite sports of a considerable portion of the population is scoffing at the dramatic critics. It is not, however, a defense of dramatic criticism we propose to write here. Criticism that is serious and sincere needs no defense, for it is inevitable, whether we like and agree with it or not; and the more serious and sincere our drama is, the more criticism we shall have. The serious drama is a record, presented for public consideration, of the dramatist's vision and philosophy of life—whether he is conscious of it or not. And no public presentation of so important a matter can, or should, pass without challenge and consideration. Such challenge and consideration is any criticism worthy of the name. If it concerns itself merely with a few technical rules, or seeks merely to fill a column in an evening paper with jesting, or to inform the public whether such and such a play is going to run three weeks or three months, it is hardly criticism at all.

When we attack dramatic criticism, it might be well to reflect first whether it is criticism we are attacking. Such reflection would save us a lot of breath.

The residue of theatrical reporting, the real criticism, is most often scoffed at because its verdicts disagree with our personal tastes or judgments (which, in untrained minds, are usually the same). It may not be amiss, then, to set forth by examples of recent seasons certain principles which guide the critic to his judgments, to show the reasons why he calls this play good and that play bad. Recently the writer of this paper received a letter from a somewhat irate reader, which contained the following bit of argument—"I should like to know what you think of Ibsen and 'The Man from Home.' " To tell all we think of Ibsen would, unfortunately, require more space than the editor will allow us. To tell what we think of "The Man from Home," however, calls for less room. We think it a pleasant and popular piece of extremely parochial jingo. We should class it as an excellent bad play. But it is of the good plays we should prefer to speak at this time, taking up several that are fresh in memory, and showing, if possible, why the critics praised them, either in accordance with, or in defiance of, the popular verdict.

After twelve years of constant analytic attendance at the theatre, we are ourselves persuaded that underlying all other questions, technical or what not, is the question of the playwright's sincerity. Did he write his play because the theme or the characters interested him, did he write it to please himself, to express himself; or did he write it because he fancied such a theme or such a set of characters would strike the popular fancy? The machine-made dramas, written to the order of such and such a star, the vain efforts of one playwright to repeat another's success in certain lines, or to duplicate his own, may have all the supposedly requisite technical excellencies. But they are invariably at most but the success of an hour, and they are invariably poor plays from any higher consideration. A man may write his heart out, and still produce a poor drama, to be sure, for lack of the technical gift. But no man with only the technical gift and a desire to make money can ever write a good play, a play, that is, which will ring true and stand the test of revival.

The first test a critic applies to a new work, then, is this test of sincerity. And no more striking examples of sincerity are to be found on the modern stage than the plays of John Galsworthy. It is nei-

ther their theme nor their literary polish which primarily causes their high estimation by critics and the judicious amateurs. It is the still, white flame of passionate sincerity which illuminates them. The author isn't writing to please us, he is writing to tell us about certain men and women he has observed, to plead with us to understand these people; he is asking us to look with him upon this or that episode of real life (set by him upon the stage), and to comprehend a little clearer its significance. That is why his plays seem so worth while, so like a real experience rather than a mere entertainment. And that, primarily, is why the critics praise them so highly.

Three of these plays have been professionally produced in America, "The Silver Box" by Miss Ethel Barrymore, "Strife" by the New Theatre, and, most recently, "The Pigeon" at Mr. Ames' Little Theatre. The first failed largely because Miss Barrymore's public were not yet ready to receive her in anything but pretty piffle. The second shared in the general failure of the New Theatre project. The last was a success with Mr. Ames' public. But success or failure with a certain public cannot rightly affect the critic's judgments. These plays were acclaimed, then, first for their sincerity, their

honest, truthful, sympathetic presentation of a human situation, and secondarily for their literary skill and distinction, and technical expertness. These latter qualities, of course, appeal more consciously to the critic than to the playgoer; and to some playgoers they do not appeal at all. They are most widely valued in a community where the largest number of theatre-goers are æsthetically well educated, as in Paris. But as it is a part of the critic's mission to help in the process of æsthetic education, he cannot ignore them if he would.

William Archer, in his new book, "Play Making," says, "The French plays (of Brieux), in my judgment, suffer artistically from the obtrusive predominance of the theme—that is to say, the abstract element—over the human and concrete factors in the composition. Mr. Galsworthy's more delicate and unemphatic art eludes this danger, at any rate in "Strife." We do not remember until all is over that his characters represent classes, and his action is, one might almost say, a sociological symbol."

This is a tribute at once to his literary and technical skill, and to his sincerity. We do not feel "Strife" to be a tract on the labor question nor "The Pigeon" a sermon on the need of love and sympathy for our fallen fellow beings, because Mr. Gals-

worthy is human enough himself to put real laborers and real fallen fellow beings upon the stage, and skilful enough to let them tell their own story, instead of putting labeled puppets on the stage and preaching about them. If Mr. Galsworthy's plays fail of a wide popularity, that is because their themes are sober and thoughtful, and they lack the sex element a conventional public has come to expect. But they have in a remarkable degree that attribute of sincerity which inspires respect; they seem real episodes in the lives of real people, not machines concocted to amuse or thrill; and they are written with technical expertness and distinction of dialogue. That is why the critic acclaims them.

Taking now two plays of widely different sort, the Scotch comedy, "Bunty Pulls the Strings," and that one-act Irish masterpiece, "Riders to the Sea," we find the first has been enormously popular both in New York and Chicago, while Synge's drama, when presented by the Irish Players here, drew only half a handful of people. Yet the critic calls them both good plays, and probably considers the less popular the finer drama. Why?

Anybody can tell why he likes "Bunty Pulls the Strings." It is funny. It is funny because it so neatly and wittily and lovingly hits off the foibles

of the Scotch character and manners. The story of the play alone would not make it a popular success, nor a critical. Indeed, it is rather a simple, obvious and old-fashioned story. But the characters are all odd, humorous and interesting. We delight to watch Bunty manage the whole community. We delight in the quaint accent and idiom, in the quaint costumes, in the flavor and atmosphere of the story. Here is a case where mere academic structure counts for far less than the embroidery. Yet any critic who is not a hidebound formalist is bound to call it a good play, because it does rouse our interest and our mirth, it creates its mood and lets us see into the life of a Scotch village; it does, in short, what it sets out to do. It is truthful and it is funny.

There is nothing funny about "Riders to the Sea." That solemn, heart-searching little masterpiece is almost Greek in its tragic simplicity. But it, too, is honest, and it does what it sets out to do. It sets out to create in the auditor a sense of the terrible spectre of Death which broods over the fishermen's huts on the bleak west coast of Ireland, and yet to create it in such language—the poetic language of a sensitive peasant people—that there is a solemn beauty in the performance, and the play

is not brutal but almost spiritual, tragic yet lovely. It has always been the mission of true poetry so to touch with transforming wand the themes of Fate and Death. No man with a soul above the brute can sit before the Irish Players' performance of "Riders to the Sea" without feeling at once its tragic solemnity and its searching poetry. Its language, always the language these Celtic peasants might naturally use, falls like hushed music on the ear, though it brings the flutter of the wings of Death. That is why the critic calls this not only a good play, but a great play; and though a public which likes always to laugh avoids it in America, the critic feels that it will still be performed when "The Man From Home" has retired to Kokomo forever.

We may also contrast two other plays, both of which the critics called good, but only one of which enjoyed much patronage in this country, "The Concert," produced by Mr. Belasco, and "The Thunderbolt," by Pinero, produced both by the New Theatre, and, more recently, by the Chicago Theatre Society last winter. The critic calls "The Concert" a good play (quite aside from the merits of Mr. Belasco's particular production) because with shrewd worldly wisdom and humor the author holds up and dissects types of character, particularly the

character of a childish, egotistical, much flattered piano virtuoso (type of the "artistic temperament"), and the character of the steady, comfortable, forgiving wife. The absurdities of such women as lose their heads over musicians are also satirized. This play is good because it has these elements of truth, fused into a well made and interesting story. This play is successful, of course, because its truth is patent and its interest and fun unflagging.

Now, "The Thunderbolt" is a satire on types of character, also, on middle-class British smugness, hypocrisy and money greed (but British more in externals than otherwise, since money greed and smugness have been known to exist elsewhere!). Because its characters are human and true, its story well knit and sustained, its sincerity and interest unescapable, the critic is just as bound to call this a good play as "The Concert." Yet the public went to "The Concert" but not to "The Thunderbolt." Why? Not because they considered "The Thunderbolt" a bad play, but because its satire is too mordant and grim, its story too harsh, its picture too pitifully revealing of the sordid side of our frail humanity—that, and also a little, one is sure, because it was produced at the New Theatre and by

the Chicago Players, and so shared in the public indifference toward those institutions. Such audiences as did see it felt its power and most of them followed its story with complete absorption. That a thoughtless theatre-goer doesn't like "*The Thunderbolt*," because it oppresses him, is no reason at all why he should leap with both feet upon the critic who praises it. The critic does not ask whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, but whether it is true, whether its characters are real people, its story well knit and logical, its author's deductions, his "*criticism of life*," sound and just. Finding them to be so in "*The Thunderbolt*," he is in duty bound to proclaim it a good play. Only if he failed to do so should he be leaped upon. The time may yet come when enough of the public will find entertainment in truth, whether grave or gay, rather than in mere jesting or in truth only when it is pleasant, to make such works as "*The Thunderbolt*" successful in proportion to their real merits.

The later plays of Augustus Thomas have, fortunately, pleased both critics and public. They have pleased the critics because, without sacrificing that narrative interest in a well sustained story which was always the basis of Mr. Thomas's appeal, they have revealed, besides, a purpose to make that story

significant of some larger idea. Both in "The Witching Hour" and "As a Man Thinks," Mr. Thomas has shown real people on the stage, talking naturally yet with a certain distinction, and involved in an interesting set of situations. Yet these situations have been cleverly chosen to illustrate some phase of the author's philosophy of life—chiefly, one guesses, a belief that our inner thoughts have a tremendous dynamic power in shaping our characters, our outward acts, even the fortunes of those about us. Mr. Thomas really believes this. His later plays have a ring of sincerity. It is a belief that has great powers for good. Therefore his plays gain an added importance. And, since this message they bear is one of cheer, and since they do not bear it in the form of a sermon but a good story, they are popular with all theatre-goers, as well as with the critics.

"The Typhoon," now being played by Walker Whiteside, is an excellent example of a play which the critic is obliged at once to praise and to condemn, to praise for its underlying theme and its general truth, to condemn for its technical shortcomings. It is a popular play, because its theme is of such novelty and interest that the shortcomings are not sufficiently felt by the public to destroy the

appeal. The theme of "The Typhoon" is the contrasted characters and ideals of the Japanese and the Europeans. A Japanese diplomat is shown at Berlin, engaged on a secret and important work for his government. He becomes entangled with a European courtesan, and finally he loses that self-control which is an ideal of his race, and murders her. He is only able to finish his work because one of his countrymen, regarding the national mission as of more importance than his own life, takes the blame for the crime. Broadly, the play shows the intense racial self-possession of the Japanese, their overpowering national consciousness, their total antithesis to Occidental individualism. It is true to the type depicted, and the story is told with much embellishment of exotic atmosphere. It also has its moments of great theatrical excitement. Hence its popular appeal. So far, it is a good play. But it has many structural weaknesses. In the first place, we are never told what that great "work" the Japanese diplomat is doing consists of. We do not see why it should be of such profound importance to Japan. In the second place, many of the scenes are crudely handled, so that the illusion of reality is lost. Sometimes the Japanese babble in their native tongue (or what is supposed to be their

native tongue) and sometimes they talk English. The closing of the play is blind. Moreover, one wonders what would become of the point that a Japanese is ruined by the Occidental love passion if the European woman had been a good woman, instead of a scarlet lady. Such points as these are flaws in workmanship and logic, and the critic is bound to condemn them, even in the most popular of plays. They are not to be found in the masterpieces of the drama, where perfect workmanship unites with depth or charm of idea and truth of character—and it is by the masterpieces that the critic judges.

A frequent criticism of critics is that they are over given to praising gloom and depreciating mirth. Critical wrath against the "happy ending," however, is not due to the fact that the critics love laughter less but that they love logic more. Nobody in his senses objects to a happy ending to a comedy. It is when the happy ending is arbitrarily tacked on a play which was foreordained to a tragic conclusion that the critic rages. Any play which sets out to depict a set of circumstances which, to be true to life and significant as a commentary on society, has to end unhappily, and then deliberately, to please the ladies and matinée maids, throws

everybody into somebody else's arms at the finish, is a bad play, an insincere and false play, and no amount of talk and excuses can make it anything else. Imagine Shakespeare calling in the family doctor to save Hamlet and resuscitate Ophelia! Imagine Ibsen bringing Nora back from the front door in "*The Doll's House*," and casting her into Helmer's arms!

Naturally, an audience wants to see characters in whom it has become interested, happy. But if, to make them happy, truth to human nature has to be sacrificed, then they cannot be happy and the play remain a good one.

But it is not alone that you critics condemn the happy ending, the reader may object. You seem to prefer the solemn, serious, gloomy dramas, as a class, to those which are light and merry. There's a reason for this seeming preference, dear reader. The critic does not really prefer such dramas as a class, but such dramas are, as a class, more often good than the other kind; they are more often truthful, sincere and logical. That is partly because the playwrights who write not to express themselves but to catch the public pennies usually write comedies or machine-made romances, while the more serious plays are written by the more serious play-

wrights. It is partly because it is almost always easier to make bad people effective in fiction than good—a well known fact. But it is chiefly because most writers, in common with the rest of us, are more deeply stirred by the wrongs and sufferings of the world than by its joys. We don't, as a rule, rise up and shout because our neighbor is getting along happily with his wife. If he is beating her, however, we are very likely to act. It is so with the earnest dramatist. Joy, to be sure, with some is a passion, and comedy a gift. J. M. Barrie is one of them. Nothing could be truer than Barrie's fantasy, and "*The Admirable Crichton*" is one of the finest and most significant plays yet written in English in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the fact remains that those dramatists who write because they really have something to say, more often than not feel impelled to talk about the wrongs of the world rather than its farces.

Now the serious critic, too, hopes that he has something to say. He wants to have something to say, at any rate. When he sees such a play as "*Officer 666*" or "*Seven Days*," what can he say, save that it is an hilarious farce—go, and laugh, and be happy, and God bless you? But when he sees Galsworthy's "*The Pigeon*," or Thomas's "*As a*

Man Thinks," or Gorky's "Night Refuge," or Pinero's "Mid-Channel," he is confronted with a serious man's opinions on life and conduct, and his own opinions rush into accord or conflict, and what he has to say is limited only by the space he has to say it in. He personally likes these plays because they give him intellectual stimulus and emotional glow. And he believes they are far better plays than the other kind, because they are bound to give any intelligent spectator the same reaction. If he can get these reactions from a comedy (as from "The School for Scandal" or Shaw's "Arms and the Man" or Barrie's "Admirable Crichton"), the critic is as glad as you are. But he cannot often get them from the comedies of commerce, and that is chiefly why he seems to prefer the others.

Mary Shaw once played Ibsen's "Ghosts" in Cripple Creek, and after the performance she heard a rough miner say to his companion, "Say, Bill, that play made a feller use his cocoanut!"

✓ The play that makes a critic use his cocoanut, he believes, is a better play than one which doesn't.

THE MAN OF LETTERS AND THE NEW ART OF THE THEATER

1913

William Shakespeare, when he wrote his plays, did not have to worry about scenery, and because with the stroke of a pen he could create a forest of Arden or shift from *Juliet's* garden to the *Friar's* cell, he has been the plague of scene-painters and producers ever since scenery was invented. It is only in our generation that the art of stage-scenery has begun to be able to meet the exacting demands of Shakespearean drama not only mechanically, but poetically. Beginning with the visions of Gordon Craig and the practical productions by the German stage managers, like Max Reinhardt, a development has been going on in the theater which amounts almost to a revolution, and of which examples have at last reached America not alone in the imported pantomime, "Sumurun," rather a bizarre example, but in the productions being shown this winter by Margaret Anglin, to a lesser extent in those made

by Mr. Faversham, in Mr. Ames' Little Theater, in the Boston Opera-House, and elsewhere.

In a Lowell Institute lecture last winter, Professor George P. Baker predicted that in ten years the old-fashioned, "realistic" scenery (which, after all, seldom is realistic) would be quite obsolete save only in realistic plays with interior settings. If that is the case, the so-called "new scenery" is one of the most important developments in the whole history of the drama, and demands our attention. The present writer believes with Mr. Baker that it is the case; and he believes furthermore that we are on the eve of a renaissance of theatrical art,—the art of the whole theater, that is to say,—not merely of the writing of plays, but of their production.

In a word, the new scenery is *pictorial*. The reader will perhaps exclaim at once that so was the old scenery. But in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases that is just what it wasn't, and isn't. It was a more or less crude attempt at a reproduction of place,—which, to be sure, is the first duty of scenery,—but it was, and is, generally a mechanical reproduction, without pictorial quality and the higher forms of illusion. At how many stage-settings would you care to look for five minutes, with no

play going on, regarding them purely as picture? How many have you ever beheld which, quite on their own merits, gave you the same mood of illusion as the drama itself? How many productions of Shakespeare have you ever witnessed in which the scenery was not a caricature on the verse, and the "waits" while the caricatures were being shifted so long that half the text had to be omitted? How many perspectives of distance have you ever seen on the stage which did not end palpably twenty feet to the rear in a painted back-drop? In short, how many stage-settings have you seen which were independent art?

The new scenery can be independent art, that is, a pictorial and plastic expression worthy of companioning the highest flights of dramatic literature; and because this is so, the stage productions of the future more than ever in the past will contain elements of illusion beyond the range of mere literature, and the author's talent will more than ever be an incomplete equipment for the true man of the theater.

In the earlier periods of literary creation the drama always occupied a high and often a supreme place both in literary dignity and popular regard. We have merely to glance at the Greece of Sopho-

cles, the England of Shakespeare, the France of Molière and Racine, to realize this. So strongly did the traditional literary importance of drama persist that the eighteenth century found Addison writing "Cato" and Garrick besieged with manuscript plays from writers great and small, fitted and unfitted for the calling. It was the sudden expansion of the novel form in the nineteenth century which more than anything else put the drama back in our day into a place of secondary importance in literary, if not in popular, regard—a place that for the most part, we are forced to admit from the examples produced, was its proper one.

In the age of Shakespeare, of Dryden, even of Fielding, probably Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and a host of lesser novelists would have striven to write for the stage; nor is there much reason to doubt that many of them could have learned to write for the stage successfully. But the novel having opened up a new channel of expression, in many ways an easier channel of expression, and certainly a fuller channel for the conveyance of all kinds of philosophic ideas, "criticism of life," and so on, won their allegiance instead. Moreover, the novel was suddenly realistic—suddenly, as the gods reckon time. When we reflect that Goldsmith's "She

"Stoops to Conquer" was considered realistic; when we read the strange melodramas of Kotzebue, which held the boards in the day of Scott; when we scan the playbills of any theater during the early years of Thackeray and Dickens, we can readily see why writers of talent turned away from the drama to the new, vastly fresher, and seemingly unlimited form of expression—the novel. Thereafter the drama steadily sank from its ancient post of literary honor, particularly in England, till it had to offer, against the novels of George Eliot and Thackeray, the farces of Morton or at best the "tea-cup comedies" of Tom Robertson, and in America Augustin Daly's "Under the Gas Lamps" against "The Rise of Silas Lapham." Small wonder the drama was scorned by men of letters.

The contemporary drama was reborn in the North of a literarily new nation, and its father was Henrik Ibsen. It is not true, of course, that Ibsen worked alone, that no other stage writers in other lands preceded him or were contemporaneous with him in the movement to put the stage on a new footing. Dumas *fil*s and Augier certainly did their share, and stirrings of the new spirit were abroad in Germany. Realistic fiction was not without its influence, also. Nevertheless, Ibsen was the greatest

single factor, in part from the self-imposed isolation in which he labored. In this connection it is not necessary to hold a brief either for or against his own plays. Probably the truth about their merit lies between the extremes of Shavian admiration and Winterish detraction. Much of their atmosphere, certainly, is local rather than universal, and as they recede their interest appears to grow less. But of their technical importance there can be no question. You have only to see a revival of a successful play of one generation ago—"Liberty Hall," for example, produced at the Empire Theater, New York, in 1892, and revived in March, 1913,—to realize what a tremendous revolution was wrought by the simple overthrow of certain conventions of play-writing, such as the aside and the soliloquy, and the development of a technique which could remove the fourth wall of the room and show us reality. As soon as the dramatists of the Western World found that they could put real life, not stage life, before their audiences, and began to do so, what was bound to happen did happen—the men who knew most accurately and felt most deeply about real life were acclaimed the best dramatists. One did not need to be a Sardou to be successful. To be successful in the higher courts of taste, indeed,

one needed not to be a Sardou. In short, reality succeeded trickery. The drama once more could offer to men of letters a worthy reward, because it could offer them at last a technique by which they could express their criticisms, their philosophies, their beliefs about life, no less effectively—though not so easily, because vastly more selective condensation is required—than by the novel.

That is where the drama stands to-day so far as it is a matter of spoken text, and writers of the first rank are returning to it, as they always will return when conditions are favorable, not only because of its rich financial rewards, but because of its glamour, its excitement, its superb directness and vividness. J. M. Barrie has forsaken the novel altogether. G. B. Shaw is certainly as widely read and as influential a man of letters as now writes in English. Galsworthy has had six plays produced in the last seven years. John Masefield, one of the leading English poets of the time, is a dramatic author. Sudermann and Hauptmann in Germany are essentially dramatic authors. The new Celtic revival is a dramatic revival, and Synge is its genius. The real literary life of a city like Manchester, England, centers about Miss Horniman's playhouse. Within the last ten years, in more than one of our American

universities, the undergraduate interest in literature has shifted largely from the essay and fiction to the drama. This is notably true of Harvard. There is not to-day, and there never has been, a spontaneous movement among the men and women who make up the audiences for any form of art to compare in extent or seriousness of interest with the Drama League of America, which now counts over fifty thousand members devoted to a study of the playhouse. By every token, the drama has entered upon a new era of respectability, and is once more held in high regard by men of letters, and deserves that regard. Mr. Galsworthy's "Strife" is no less important as literature than his "Patrician"; Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way" is no less genuine a document than the stories of Mrs. Deland.

We might, then, suppose from a casual glance that the theater has returned to its ancient condition in its relation to men of letters, that the play which would "bear the test of print" and justify itself as literature to the reader as well as to the spectator was once more the final test. We might suppose, in short, that the man of letters and the man of the theater are once more interchangeable. Let us see if that is the case.

The poet who wrote for the theater of Athens

wrote for a static stage, for actors who wore conventional masks, for a perfectly definite and fixed condition of presentation. The poet who wrote for the Elizabethan theater likewise wrote for a static, or very nearly static, stage, and once more the effects achieved were only such as lay in the power of his words or situations to convey. Even after the application of scenery to the stage and the withdrawal of the actors behind a proscenium-arch, so that the stage was no longer static, but potentially pictorial and plastic, the author still prevailed over the "production," and continued to prevail, of course with the actor's aid, until recent years. But the perfection of electric illumination, the invention of the revolving-stage, the introduction of "relief" scenery, the application by a hundred and one technical methods of impressionism to the art of scenery and production, have suddenly put so powerful a weapon into the hand of the producer of the play that he has become frequently as important as the author, and not infrequently much more important. *His* imagination, *his* creative powers, if they chance to be greater than the author's, will produce an effect more potent over the audience than the text of the drama. Hence it is that we find such a man as Gordon Craig, who is essentially an artist in moods

and scenery, not a man of letters, talking about a new art of the theatre—of the theatre, mind you, not of drama—and by his influence and the influence of imitators in Germany, such as Max Reinhardt, working at a revolution in the playhouse, a revolution extending even to the physical construction of the building. These revolutionists are not dramatists, they are not men of letters; they are producers, stage-managers, in short, strictly men of the theatre. However, if we have yet scarcely begun to realize it in America, they are shaping the playhouse and the drama of the future, and conditioning the dramatist. No sooner, then, do we seem to have spanned once more the gap between the man of letters and the stage, between literature and acted drama, than we find a Gordon Craig busily hacking down our bridge!

The new art of the theatre is based primarily on the electric switchboard. It recognizes that great stretches of painted canvas in a bright glare can never be illusive in any high sense, that they are bound to be the colored blocks of overgrown children; and so, first of all, it gets its colors not from the canvas, but from the lamps, and makes its perspectives with shadows rather than with drawn lines. Secondly, it is usually an art of elimination down to

the salient features of a given scene which shall most effectively comport with the mood of the play, and which can be combined into a true picture. It is impressionistic. It is to the old art what modern landscape-painting is to the mid-Victorian chromo. When it does not eliminate, when it employs the old methods of building "realistic" houses all over the stage, for instance, it does so in patches of color or with a pictorial rhythm of design that converts the ancient chaos into a new charm. Such is often Mr. Urban's method at the Boston Opera-House.

Take, for an example of simplification, Livingston Platt's settings for Miss Anglin's Shakespearean repertoire. They are painted almost entirely in a stipple of primary colors, which would tell virtually as gray in white light. Color is secured by the illumination, which is from above, not up from the foot-lights. Each Shakespearean play has a special permanent fore-stage set up, with entrances on each side, which is designed to harmonize with the drama. On this fore-stage are acted all the intermediate scenes, while the main scenes are being shifted behind. These main scenes are simple. The palace, for example, in "Twelfth Night," shows only three graceful arched windows and through them the deep blue sky, while there are only two pieces of fur-

niture in the room. Yet the picture amply satisfies the imagination, and fills the eye with pleasure, because Mr. Platt is an artist. Moreover, every change can be made without a moment's wait, and the entire text of the drama played as quickly as on a bare stage. Here at last the scene-setting can match the magic and the speed of Shakespeare's verse.

In "*Sumurun*," staged by Max Reinhardt, we saw how the new art can get striking effects by daring to group the players in high relief against a jet-black velvet curtain,—mimes against primeval darkness!—and letting the very rhythm of their shifting poses conspire to the emotional effect. Again in "*Sumurun*" we saw how "relief scenery," which is simply a curtain painted in the flat, without any attempt at the third dimension, can, if it is designed by a real artist, be more potent than a whole littered stage of "solid" houses in perspective. Gordon Craig staged "*Hamlet*" in Moscow amid a maze of gigantic towering screens—nothing else—shifted in various designs, and the effect, while undoubtedly too bizarre for present American taste, was said to be wonderful. Less of a break from tradition was the Russian scenery for "*Boris*," shown at the Metropolitan Opera House last Winter, where a lofty wall

of white went up, up, out of sight, and against it huddled a group of players in reds and browns, imaginatively dwarfed till the white walls were indeed those of a mighty building. Even Belasco, arch-realist though he is, has felt the new possibilities, and in "A Good Little Devil," by a complete dimming of his lights in the first act, was able to open the wall of the boy's chamber to show the star-gemmed night sky, and then the angels floating in and standing about the bed in a faint golden radiance, like a moonlit fresco by Fra Angelico. That picture, indeed, was worth all the text of the play. It had far more of illusive art about it. It, and not the spoken dialogue, was stage "literature." And it was made possible, of course, by the modern electric switchboard. Electricity marks a new element in theatric art which was totally unknown in the past. The new art is based not on the fact that electricity has increased the *reality* of stage-settings, but on the fact that it has vastly increased the possibilities of *suggestion*: it veils reality in the nimbus of mystery. It has brought to the aid of illusion the army of shadows.

Now, the effect on an audience of such stage-settings as these is something apart from the text of the drama, in the sense that it is not supplied by the

dramatist, but by the producer; not by the words, the literary feature of the play, but by the arts of the painter and the electrician. Naturally, a good producer strives always to produce an effect which is in keeping with the text and spirit of the play. Indeed, the fact that Max Reinhardt has no fixed method of production is only a testimony to his excellence as a stage-manager. He tries, if not always with success, to catch the essential mood, the atmosphere, the emotional motif, call it what you will, of the drama, in his impressionistic settings. Even Gordon Craig, who staged "*Hamlet*" with towering screens, would not dream of so staging "*The Easiest Way*," which is not metaphysical, poetic, remote. It is worth noting, however, that Mr. Craig has recently published a design for Ibsen's "*Rosmersholm*" which is almost pure suggestion—suggestive, some might say, of a rat-trap. The fact remains that now, as never before in the history of the playhouse, the producer is a man of potentially as much importance as the dramatist, and the effects he achieves with canvas and switchboard can be as potent a part of our pleasure, even of our emotional enkindling, as the spoken words of the play. We feel that the "production," in short, is a part of the genuine art of the drama. We have long talked of

the drama as combining all the arts, literature, painting, sculpture, music; but beside the new scenery and the new grouping of players in relief, the old scenery and the old grouping had rather less of suggestive art about them than the Victorian chromo. What we have long said was true is only now becoming so. And as it more and more becomes so, the dramatist who is merely a man of letters becomes less and less effectual in the theatre.

He becomes less and less effectual because more and more of the final effect of his work will not be his own planning, but somebody else's, and because that unity of impression which must be the great test of a genuine work of art will more and more depend on the chance unity of temperament between author and producer. The more potent the pictorial side of drama becomes, the more important it becomes that the author shall possess a pictorial mind, that the emotional and philosophic content of his work shall be capable of fusion with the most suggestive of settings. This implies more than a mere understanding of what is mechanically possible in the theatre. Successful writers for the stage have always possessed that understanding, which is a part of the general understanding of dramatic construction. Men of letters who have not taken the trouble

to achieve this general understanding have always failed in the theatre, as Browning failed. But in the new theatre not only an understanding of what is mechanically possible, but the ability to conceive and suggest the scenic designs, if not actually to put them on paper, will be required of those dramatists who are to be most eminent beyond the narrow bounds of contemporary realism. Contemporary realism, which has had its way with our literature of late, and probably to our good, will nevertheless not long endure as the only or the highest form of art. Already the theatre is swinging from it. But when fancy is turned loose in the theatre of the future—of the immediate future—when poetry riots, and romance, no longer are the writer's line and the actor's voice the only elements of suggestion which count supremely in the effect, and no longer can the judgment of the printed page be invoked as the final judgment. So fused with the text will be the scenery, the pictorial element, so much a vital, integral part of the play will be the painting and the lighting, even the rhythm of the groupings, perhaps, that the printed text will not be the play at all. The producer will be half-author. The man of letters will be helpless without the man of the theatre.

That of course, is why these men of the new the-

atre are so impatient or even scornful of academic judgments, the traditional tests of literature. They know that they, too, are artists, and they rightly demand tests of their art which are proper to it, not tests devised for a wholly different form. And that is why the man of letters in the new theatre will be an incomplete, if not sometimes a futile, worker, unless he, too, abandons the ancient tradition of the printed text as a final test of dramatic literature, and makes the test of theatrical performance, which demands a new judgment in the fusion of intellectual, emotional, plastic, and pictorial suggestion. We are to judge a play now by its capacities under adequate production, and as adequate production implies elements of art quite foreign to printed literature, dramatic literature now steps beyond the ancient test, and perhaps should drop the term literature altogether, as making for confusion.

And what shall be the relation of the man of letters to the new theatre? It is quite inconceivable that we shall ever follow Gordon Craig to the limits of his theory that the drama should give up all attempts at reality, even throwing over human actors, and abandon itself to a puppet dance amid expressive scenery. That way madness lies. The modern drama of contemporary life has come to stay, though

in a few years we shall demand something less than one third of the furniture which now clutters our stage rooms. The vocal side of dramatic art, carrying to audiences by the common medium of human intercourse the intellectual ideas of the dramatist, the sense of reality, the revelation of character, will of course always abide, whether in contemporary realism or the highest flights of poetic fancy. The new art of the theatre will be an evolution—not, after all, a revolution. It will add to the firm basis of literary solidity the fresh element of pictorial appeal, fusing the two into one structure, not, as of old, employing pictorial appeal merely as a conventional sign-post of place. That is all our present-day "realistic" scenery does. It is a sign-board of place. It has no emotional quality of its own; it cannot be called a branch of art. It is not really essential to the mood and effect of the drama. But in the new theatre the "production," the elements of scenery, lighting, grouping, the colors of the backdrops and costumes, the very design of the settings, are conscious art works in themselves; and when once the dramatist can rely upon them, he has achieved a whole new range of materials to work with besides words and the intellectual ideas words express. That is the point. The man of letters

works with words, but the new dramatist with scene cloths and switchboards and living statues and even great patches of pure color. If the man of letters, then, is to express himself fully, reach a high development, in the new theatre, he must add to his traditional literary equipment the ability to use these new materials to his purpose, making them combine and fuse into a great unity of impression.

In the new theater, then, the dramatist must be painter and sculptor of words, ideas, emotions, no less than writer. The old interchangeableness between dramatist and man of letters is gone. The great dramatists must still be born men of letters, but they must be something else besides: they must be artists of the theatre, aware that the theatre is not the printed page, rather proud, perhaps, that it is not, and impatient of any judgment which is not formed from a seat in the auditorium.

WHAT IS ENTERTAINMENT?

1914

How often we have heard somebody say, "Well, after all, I go to the theatre to be entertained!" It is but another statement of Barrett Wendell's sarcastic definition of the duty of the American theatre — "To send the suburbs home happy." But how many of those who make, or those who listen to, this remark, have ever stopped to think just what entertainment means?

Not only are we prone to forget that entertainment is a thing entirely relative to the age and neighborhood, but that it is still further relative to the individual, and when we say that we go to the theatre to be entertained we have no right to mean anything more than that. But we always *do* mean more than that. We always mean that we want a play which will *amuse* us or pleasantly affect our emotions, without tiring the attention, without bringing up issues which will have to be carried away for digestion outside of the theatre, without, in short, in any way dis-

turbing the even flow of our daily lives and the established order of our ideas; and, in addition, we refuse to admit other people's standards of entertainment. Now, that isn't fair. Of course everybody goes to the theatre to be entertained. Art exists for no other purpose than to entertain—to occupy the mind, to add a super-meaning and grace and charm to life. Art is a measure of the richness and happiness of a civilization. But entertainment and amusement are not the same thing, and so this popular (and wholly correct) belief that the theatre exists to entertain has been converted into an evil influence by the confusion of the two terms.

Indeed, even amusement is a relative term. As Gilbert said, it may be funny to sit down in a pork pie, but you don't have to sit down in a pork pie to be funny. Some people laugh at the pork pie school of comedians—others prefer Gilbert. But entertainment is a much broader term than amusement, embracing all the various appeals of the allied arts of the theatre, and unless our theatre is broad enough to meet the various demands of various people, it is but partially fulfilling its function. Let us look more carefully at some of these possible demands, let us try to see if entertainment cannot be found in quarters unsuspected, let us try to see if the stan-

dard of what is entertaining is not, even for the individual, a changeable thing, which can be raised and even altered completely by a little effort on his part. We demand of children that they alter *their* standards in the process of education. Why should all the rest of us cease in our growth the day we leave school, or cast our first vote?

Let us take first the matter of scenery. The first function of scenery, without question, is to supply an illusion of place. But need its function stop there? And are there not various degrees, even various kinds of illusion? Why should we not find entertainment, then, in watching scenic experiments in the theater, and so give encouragement to the experimenters? Our stage has made practically no progress on the mechanical side, while the stages of Europe have been hotbeds of experiment, calling forth the best talents of architects and painters. That is solely because we, the American public, cannot see "entertainment" in anything different from the comfortable routine to which we are accustomed.

When a scene is set up for an hour before our eyes, is there any sensible reason why it should not, in addition to creating the proper illusion of place, also give us pure æsthetic pleasure on its own account? Indeed, there is every reason why it should.

If you buy even knives and forks and plates to eat with, you strive also to buy attractive ones, decorative ones. Why, then, should not a stage picture compose into harmonies of color and design, why should it not please the eye? Let us keep watch on the stage pictures we see, let us give encouragement to the producers who have the courage to throw about half the furniture now used into the cellar and to substitute for the present restless and meaningless crisscrossings and wanderings about of the players significant and attractive groupings. Let us encourage, as well, those producers who, in plays which permit of a romantic or poetic treatment, dare to get away from the conventional pasteboard and give us decorations of line and color. Let us, in short, find entertainment in the scene-painter's and decorator's art.

Another phase of the drama in which the general mass of theater-goers fail to find entertainment, very largely because it has never occurred to them to look for it there, is the dialogue of the play—that is, the literary charm of the writing. It goes without saying that if a play is to endure it must be not only effective dramatically but it must be written with sufficient literary style to withstand the acid test of print. However, in the past, few plays were ever

printed (fortunately, the Drama League and other influences have begun to alter that condition), and even to-day few people stop to consider whether or not a play has enduring qualities. Its immediate appeal for the one evening when they have paid their money for seats is all that concerns them.

Yet what an added source of entertainment firm, well-knit writing is—writing which possesses style! You have only to contrast the dialogue of Somerset Maughm's "The Land of Promise" with that of Moody's "The Great Divide" (two plays of strikingly similar theme), to realize this. Mr. Moody was a poet, and the mere fact that he was writing in prose did not prevent him from writing beautifully, with passages of emotional fervor and sudden flights of imaginative suggestion. Neither did his people speak out of character, which would have been fatal in such a play. He had the sense for style, however, and from the mouth of his rough hero, in rough words, came shaggy similes which lifted the hearer. When Miss Anglin revived "Lady Windermere's Fan" last spring, the incomparably brilliant dialogue of Oscar Wilde, clean cut at every angle like a diamond, fell deliciously on the ear. One of the reasons for the success of certain plays by A. E. Thomas—"The Rainbow" and "Her Husband's

Wife"—is undoubtedly the graceful phrasing, life-like but never merely the sloppy conversation of the ordinary "man in the street."

We have carried the cult of realism too far in our theater, till our plays have become, indeed, so realistic that they are not even true of the majority. Only a small section of the public, in its most careless hours, ever talks as slangily and sloppily as the characters in a Cohan comedy or any one of half a hundred recent American dramas we might name. Moreover, if realism means that we shall hear no more beautiful language on our stage, no more careful phrasing, no more poetic figure nor eloquent period, then let us have done with realism for good and all! Fortunately, however, men and women still exist who can and do talk well and carefully and eloquently. We should find entertainment in seeing them represented on the stage, and in the skill of any playwright who can achieve by his style the charm of well-knit, virile, beautiful dialogue.

But this matter of style in plays goes far deeper than the mere literary quality of the dialogue. It goes to the roots of the construction of the play, and betrays the master craftsman (or the bungler) in a hundred ways. With a very slightly increased attention on our part we may find an added entertain-

ment in observing good workmanship, which will compensate us, perhaps, for the diminished entertainment we shall thereafter find in poor.

If you pay ten thousand dollars for a house you demand good workmanship, and you look for it carefully. Why not when you pay two dollars for a play? A real love for good workmanship is as much disclosed by the one demand as the other. Indeed, if the demand does not exist in *both* cases the real love is not there.

Let us consider the telephone: the telephone is a beneficent invention, and it has benefited nobody so much as the dramatist. Think how few plays of contemporary life you now see without a telephone on the stage. Is it there to give a realistic touch? It is not. It is there to help the dramatist get his plot across; and a very potent help it is. J. M. Barrie in his comical burlesque, "A Slice of Life," which Ethel Barrymore acted two or three winters ago, made fun of this use of the telephone. Each character, as he or she entered, rang somebody up, in order to announce his or her name for the benefit of the audience.

"Is this you, Father?" asked Miss Barrymore in a languid voice. "This is your daughter, Mrs. Hyphen-Brown—you remember."

None of Mr. Barrie's characters, of course, said any more, which was what made it funny. In serious plays they hold real conversations, however, and thus the audience can learn who they are and something about them, without the necessity of additional characters for them to talk to. The telephone thus takes its place as a new and up-to-date device for helping the dramatist get his plot across.

Did you ever stop to realize what a task it is to get a plot across? It looks easy, and the better it is done the easier it looks. When it is done by a master it doesn't seem to be done at all. Several hundred thousand would-be dramatists all over the United States think they can do it, and every manager's office is bombarded with manuscripts. But any play reader can testify from bitter experience that in not more than one out of five hundred of these manuscripts is the plot successfully got across. What looks so easy is perhaps the most difficult task that confronts the craftsman in any branch of literature.

Consider for a moment this task, in the very first act. The program tells your audience where the scene is, and the names of the characters—and no more. The audience when the curtain rises does not know which character on the stage is John Smith and

which is James Brown, it does not know anything about their past lives, or their present condition. Obviously, the first thing the author has to do is to introduce his characters to his audience, and the second thing he has to do is to tell the audience all about them.

But how is he going to do this? He cannot say anything himself, as a novelist can in a book. He cannot begin with an introductory chapter telling the secret history of their great-grandfathers. The minute the curtain rises and the characters are disclosed, the poor author has got to get out of sight and let the characters do all the talking. Now, people in daily life don't go around as a rule telling who they are and all about themselves. They don't have to. How, then, is the author going to let you know what you must know about these people, without making them act in a ridiculous manner? And remember, too, he has only three-quarters of an hour, at most, to do it in—really not that long, for his first act must go forward as well as explain the past.

Easy, eh? Why do so many plays (or rather, why did they) open with a scene between a stiff-necked butler with a British accent, and a pert French maid in a short black skirt? Is it because

these two characters are funny? No. They ceased being funny long ago—if they ever were. It is because the butler is supposed to know all about the family affairs, particularly “the master’s,” and the maid to know all about her mistress, and both are supposed to like to gossip on such subjects, so they can explain the family history more or less plausibly to the audience, and finally cry, “’Sh—here comes the master now!” Out they scurry, and you know the man who enters is Mr. Beaumont Smith, that he’s carrying on with an actress, that his wife suspects him, and that she’s going in disguise that night to the French Ball to catch him at his pranks. Dear old butler, pert French maid, many a drama could never have been launched without your aid! The telephone is rapidly superseding you, driving you out of employment, but we shall always hold you in grateful memory!

Another potent aid to the dramatist is the “Do you remember?” speech. This speech is usually made by a man to a woman. Ostensibly it is done to soften the woman’s heart, perhaps, but really it is done to explain the plot to the audience.

“Do you remember the low light on the hills that day, and the smell of violets? Your hand lay

clasped in mine, and I almost forgot that I was working for the Sugar Trust at ten dollars a week, and so couldn't ask you to marry me."

"Aha!" we cry, delighted at our perspicacity, "this young man has loved this girl a long time, but has been too proud to ask her to pledge herself to him till he could support her in the manner to which she was unaccustomed!"

Exactly! Such was the practical purpose of all the poetry.

Dramatists sometimes have a harder time now than they used to, in spite of the telephone, because that old Viking and idol-smasher, Ibsen, has made away with the soliloquy. The soliloquy was a very present help in time of trouble. After all, it wasn't so very dreadful. The characters but thought aloud. The novelist can tell the thoughts of his characters for whole pages. But now convention decrees that the poor dramatist mustn't do anything of the kind. His characters must not say anything they would not be willing that the other characters should hear! Iago, when he is alone with the audience, does not hesitate to tell them just the kind of a man he really is, and what he secretly intends to do. But nowadays, if a dramatist permitted one of his characters to do that, he would have every

critic in the country landing on him with both feet. He has got to find some other way of explaining the character, either by introducing a second congenial character for the first to talk to, or by letting deeds speak for themselves.

The "Oh, look out there!" speech is another favorite device. This is used for two purposes—to "work up an entrance," or to make vivid to the audience something which in the nature of things cannot be shown on the actual stage. Examples of either use will occur to the reader at once.

In one of Rostand's plays, "*La Princess Lointaine*," the stage shows the deck of a ship. The sailors rush to the rail and look off excitedly into the wings. "A boat is leaving the shore!" they cry. And they describe to each other its passage over the water and the Princess sitting in it, and work themselves up to a high pitch of excitement—and supposedly work the audience up as well—so that the actress playing the Princess finally enters the scene with all eyes focused upon her, which is something all actresses greatly desire.

You remember "*Quo Vadis*," no doubt? When the play was produced great posters depicted a naked damsel on the back of a bull, and a gigantic man grasping the bull's horns and breaking its neck.

Rather a piquant stage situation, you thought, and hastened to the theater. But you didn't see there any naked lady on a bull's back while a giant broke the creature's neck. You saw the spectators looking excitedly into the wings at the stage hands, and telling each other that the bull's neck was being broken. Of course, its neck had to be broken, and the audience had to know it was broken, or the story couldn't go on. But, since modern actors are not trained to break bull's necks, it had to happen off stage.

Poor old Pete Dailey, who was such a tower of humor in the Weber and Fields company, once put the prick of burlesque into this technical balloon. He was supposed to enter upon the stage from a dinner party in the next room, and his entrance was followed by the sound of applause from the invisible diners. Jerking his thumb back toward the wings, he remarked, "Jolly dogs, those stage hands!"

Did you ever stop to think why there is so often a deep, dark villain in the drama? He is there because something has got to happen to your hero or your heroine, or you'll have no drama, at least according to orthodox ideas. Mr. Shaw won't agree. Now in this world most of us are our own villains, our struggles are with ourselves, and our misfortunes

result more from our own failures, or our weaknesses, or our doctor's bills, or the price of coal, than from the dark plottings of an enemy. But in the drama these things are very hard to get across, because they are more or less spiritual, or at least invisible. It is, however, comparatively easy to get over a contest between two separate and definitely seen personalities. Therefore the villain still pursues her, even in some of the plays of Ibsen.

If it is hard to write a first act, it is still harder to write a last. Indeed, it seems to be almost impossible, so few good ones are ever written. Up to the last act, the author's job is to get everybody as mixed up and down-hearted and hopelessly licked as possible, and then, in a brief half hour, he has to get his wife back in her husband's good opinion, the lovers back in each other's arms, the missing child restored, the lost will found, the drunkard sobered up, the black sheep reformed and owning a gold mine out West. Anybody who has tackled the job of reforming a black sheep or reconciling a hopelessly mismatched couple, knows it's a job that cannot be performed between ten-thirty and eleven of the evening. But the dramatist has to do it, and make it seem as plausible and logical as he can. If he doesn't, we (and our wives) declare his play "ends

unhappily," and refuse to have anything more to do with it.

The dramatist, then, without any tools save the conversation of the characters in his play, has to tell his audience who these characters are, what they have been doing before the play begins, what sort of folk they are; he has to lead them through a series of adventures constantly increasing in tension or excitement; and finally he has to solve as logically as he may the various problems their actions have raised. He never can speak for himself, he must always speak through the mouths of his characters, and he must do it all in three hours. No wonder he is hard put to it for devices.

The best play, of course, other things being equal, is the one in which the characters reveal themselves so naturally that we are not aware they are doing it, and in which every speech which explains the past is also directly related to the present and the future; and in which, finally, the solution is not forced, but a natural and inevitable outgrowth of the characters. In the best plays, we are least conscious of the means employed to get the plot across. The first act of Augustus Thomas's "As a Man Thinks" is perhaps one of the best modern examples of the dramatist's art completely concealing itself. We watch a group

of people chatting over afternoon tea, and before we are aware of it we know all about their past and are eager to learn what their future is going to be. Thinking it over afterward, we see how craftily it was done. The skill of this act may be called dramatic style in the fullest sense, embracing pith and dignity and thrust of language, exposition so naturally made that we are never conscious that the characters are explaining themselves for our benefit, and all the time a direct forward march of the story, so that when the act ends we sense the problem and are nearer to its heart.

Is there no entertainment to be found in the unfolding of a play so written? Are we to be so heedless and childish as theatergoers that we absorb any story, regardless of its workmanship? Are we to have no standards of dramatic style, so that clumsy exposition and the failure to cover the bare bones of the plot do not hurt us? Until we do have such standards, we shall have no native drama worthy of serious consideration.

For the more obvious entertainment to be found in ideas, in the drama which takes a definite point of view on life or some social problem, there is hardly time to speak now. Such a drama, if its viewpoint is sound, and if it is well written, is fairly

sure to make its way, even if slowly. We have perhaps said enough to show, at any rate, that the pleasure of theatergoing need not be narrowly and childishly confined to an entertaining story—that those who so desire may find stimulation along almost every line of esthetic attack, or may at least *look* for it. If they fail to find it, they have a perfect right to complain that our theater is not yet fulfilling its entire function and its whole duty.

A QUIET EVENING IN THE THEATRE

1914

A quiet evening in New York! You go first to a restaurant for dinner, where, as you enter, a cloak boy (or more often girl) seizes your coat and hat. There is noise and confusion in the dining-room. The ceiling, much too low for comfort, is painful with lights. The tables are filled with people all talking at once, at the top of their voices. They have to talk at the top of their voices because if they didn't they couldn't hear themselves, let alone hearing the other fellow. The reason is that they are talking against a full orchestra, sawing rag time against the sounding-board of the too-low ceiling.

Every now and then, to be sure, this music ceases, and then comes a blessed sensation of comparative quiet, broken only by the chatter of 200 people, the clatter of dishes, the feet of the waiters. It is much like the sensation experienced when water, which has got into your ear while swimming, all of a sudden is released. But this blissfully normal condi-

tion does not last long. You have just begun to enjoy your roast and your table-mate's talk, when crash, bang, zim, teum-tum goes the band again, and the plug goes back into your ears, till against the eardrums is the roaring of Niagara.

After this pleasant meal, you and your friend start out for the theatre, having tipped the waiter enough to buy 10,783 cauliflower seeds, which, when grown, would be worth \$1078.30, at the very least. The trip to the theatre is uneventful. If you take a taxi you merely have the sensation, so dear to the heart of the New Yorker, of being robbed. If you walk, you encounter no more exciting adventures than being spattered with mud, nearly run down, deafened by the roar of an elevated train over your head, and made hoarse by trying to talk against the opposition of Manhattan street traffic. Presently you reach the theatre where the popular play you wish to see is being presented.

Of course, you already have your tickets, purchased at a hotel for \$2.50 each (or more), and you take your seats one minute before the time advertised for the curtain to rise. Then you look about you at the tiers of empty chairs and wonder why this play is called a success. In fact, you don't begin to realize why until a quarter or even a half hour

later, when the curtain at last goes up and the play begins.

Then the people begin to come. They descend the aisles talking. They climb over your feet. They step on your hat. They bang down their chairs. They make a noise taking off their wraps. They rustle and fidget and cough. The last of them do not get in and settled down till the first act is nearly over. What the first act has all been about you have but the vaguest notion. It has been plain that the actors were working very hard, and shouting very loud. That fat actor is hoarse and perspiring, like a man who has been trying to harangue a mob armed with fish-horns to drown his efforts. You are rather sorry for the actors. You are even more sorry for yourself. You are not sure that the act was uninteresting. Being young, you still are optimistic.

Then comes a breathing spell. Thanks to David Belasco, pioneer, theatre orchestras have been more or less given up, and during the first intermission your ears are rested, and in the dim "artistic" light of the modern playhouse, hearing only the meaningless buzz of 1200 people all talking at once, you find refreshment reading "What the Men Will Wear" in your programme.

Then the second act begins. You very soon discover that all the actors have got the habit. The play, of course, is a farce (the programme says a comedy). Have we not stated that it was a successful play? The actors are, therefore, being funny. There is no doubt about it, or at least they don't intend that there shall be any doubt about it. All during the first act they knew they had to shout to make themselves heard in Row A above the din of falling chair seats and the multifold rustle of arrival. Now they just keep right on shouting. Shouting has become second nature to them. Somebody once spoke of an actor who "wafted an epigram across the footlights." He was a prehistoric relic—or Marie Cahill. When an actor now has an epigram to convey, he plays he is a German howitzer and the audience is Rheims Cathedral, and he puts in the full charge and lets her bang. While the big, bow-wow actor is playing he is a German howitzer, all the other actors play they are three-inch field pieces discharging shrapnel at the gallery. Of course, they can't all be firing at once, but at least they can be changing positions, getting into more favorable cover to shell the boxes or bombard the balcony.

A battery doesn't change its position, of course,

without a deal of noise and bustle. Therefor the stage seems to be in a constant state of hubbub and confusion. The stage directors' copy of the script must look something like this:

CHAS.—“You’re a liar!” (Xs left and lights a cigarette.)

JEROME—“Don’t you dare call me a liar. You’re another!” (Xs right and sits down.)

MARCIA (Rising from the window seat)—“Gentlemen, gentlemen, I beg that you will not quarrel on account of me. Poor little me—I am not worth it. Besides, it was not my Pomeranian, anyhow.” (Comes down stage showing how her gown is cut, and lifts her arms high over her head, showing the dimples in her elbows.)

CHAS.—“Not your Pom?” (Xs right, clenching fists and stamping feet, and looks out of the window.)

JEROME—“Not your Pom?” (Crosses left and kicks a footstool into the fireplace.)

MARCIA (walking right, then left, across stage to each man and putting her arms on his shoulders, leaving powder marks)—“No, not my Pom!” (Goes up stage and poses by the draperies.)

CHAS. (raising hands to heaven and Xing left)
—“Damn!”

JEROME (Xing right and biting the end off a cigar, spitting it into the footlights)—“Hell!”

At this witty sally the audience laughs uproariously, and the actors “hold the picture.”

American stage management, as we see it at the present time in our “best-seller” type of drama, produces, in fact, very much the same effect as modern dance music—din and monotony are its characteristics. Every sentence must be shouted, every “point” driven home with an exaggerated emphasis, accompanied by an exaggerated gesture, which corresponds to the whack of the big bass drum. It is against the rules to sit, stand or recline in any one spot for more than a minute at a time unless you are a pretty actress in a bed. Then you may stay there, if you bounce up and down at regular intervals. “We must have action,” the manager cries, by which he means that the actors must run about, like the dancing mice in a shop window. Perhaps it is only natural that folks who like ragtime like this sort of thing. But it is the “art” of semi-barbarians.

The leader of the cult of St. Vitus and the Bull of Bashan is undoubtedly the clever Mr. Cohan. He is to drama and stage management what Irving Berlin is to music. If he staged “Macbeth” it would be in rag-time. How the actors rush in and

out, hurry and shout, bustle and perspire, in one of his plays! They are never still a second. No "scene," in the French sense, lasts more than five minutes, just as there is no paragraph more than ten lines long in *Munsey's Magazine*. The scenes are often clever, but how very noisy! The pace, the racket, bewilders you, hypnotizes you. You feel, when you come out of the theatre, that you have certainly got your money's worth of something, anyhow.

When you come away from "A Pair of Silk Stockings" at Mr. Ames's Little Theatre, you don't feel that you've had your money's worth. Nobody has shouted, nobody has rushed around. At times, for two or three minutes on a stretch, the actors and actresses sat in their chairs in drawing-room or chamber and talked just the way people really do talk. Why pay \$2 for this sort of thing? It's as much of a swindle as Garrick's Hamlet seemed to Partidge.

Of course, it wasn't "A Pair of Silk Stockings" that you and your friend went to see when you spent your happy evening in New York. More likely you went to "It Pays to Advertise," or some really good production where the actors really act and earn their miserable salaries.

After it was over, of course you went somewhere for supper. Once more there was the too low ceiling, the clatter of dishes, the crash of rag-time, the chatter of screaming voices trying to make themselves heard above the din, and now, in addition, the shuffle of one-stepping feet upon the dance floor. Somewhere around one or two o'clock you headed through a deserted side street toward your lodging, and suddenly became aware of a queer atmospheric condition known as silence. It made you dizzy at first. Gradually, too, you became aware of a thing up above the end of the street which memory told you was a star in the sky.

Presently you caught your bed when it came around, climbed in, and dreamed that you were armed with a Ross rifle defending a trench labelled Row H, from the assaults of seventeen thousand actors and actresses and Marie Dressler, who were charging upon you with strange cries and violent gestures, and hurling shells filled with frightful, jagged fragments of the English language.

Such is a quiet evening in the American theatre.

MIDDLE-AGED MORALIZING FOR YEASTY YOUNGSTERS

1915

A fear haunts us that we are reaching that period of life James Huneker once called his anecdote. At any rate, we are more and more given in the theatre to reminiscences and memories of "the palmy days"—said palmy days for us being the eighteen-nineties and the first few years of the present century. Quaint as it may seem to older people to speak of the eighteen-nineties as the palmy days (they were, after all, but yesterday), we are constantly being mournfully impressed with the fact that a new generation has sprung suddenly into active being which never went to plays in the eighteen-nineties, which never adored Julia Marlowe as Juliet, nor shed scalding tears at Mrs. Fiske's Tess, nor hailed the advent of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" as the swimming of a new planet into their ken, nor even realized Clyde Fitch as a contemporary. We talk with theatre-goers in New York to-

day, in fact, who have never seen a play by Clyde Fitch on the stage, and know James A. Herne only as a name, not a memory. Whereupon we feel "chilly and grown old," and begin to narrate anecdotes about "Shore Acres" or "The Climbers."

Those were hopeful days, the eighteen-nineties! Henry Arthur Jones was preaching "The Great Realities of Modern Life," and William Winter was thundering against Ibsen. Now, when a play by Ibsen is produced, nobody thunders. Where is the fun in fighting for a man if nobody fights against him? Now, pretty much anything can be produced (not that it is, but it could be) without arousing protest and hostility. And, alas! a certain zest is gone. Art, like anything else, thrives on battle smoke and martyrdom. We youngsters were boasting of what the passing generation scorned, even abominated. We saw a new dawn on the horizon, a new drama, a theatrical renaissance. Even when we had to score Fitch for his frivolities and concessions to "popular taste," we still upheld him as a worker in the native vineyard, a butterfly, perhaps, but a butterfly with genius. We battled, later, for "The Easiest Way"—ageing, it is true, but still hopeful.

But all that is past history. Now, when we are

"chilly and grown old," we look about us on the American stage and wonder what became of our renaissance, wonder where that sun of American drama is which had flushed pink the eastern sky, wonder what there is to fight for. Alas! there isn't even a William Winter to fight against.

These melancholy reflections have been inspired by a visit to Mr. Anspacher's play, "The Unchastened Woman." "The Unchastened Woman," to be sure, is a popular success and, in our humble judgment, deservedly so. Why, then, should it inspire us to melancholy? Because—and here we get into our anecdote—it is so much like a Fitch play, because it is a character study of a frivolous and selfish woman, gaining its appeal from that study rather than from mere narrative excitement, or farcical situation, or machine-made slang; and also because it gives the players a chance to act—not to show off a few pretty personal tricks, but really to act, to impersonate. Of such stuff was "The Truth" and "The Girl with the Green Eyes."

Still you fail to see why we are afflicted with melancholy at the spectacle? Simply because New York is utterly amazed at the novelty of such a drama! A few old gray beards of criticism who have withstood the long siege of the advertising de-

partments, have written, to be sure, about the character, discussing whether or not she is probable and agreeing that she isn't pleasant. But not so the youngsters. They are too surprised to debate whether she is probable, or to care whether she is pleasant. The great, stunning, overwhelming fact is that she is a character, that her moods and emotions condition the story, and that the actress who plays her (Miss Emily Stevens) is so busy trying to be the part that it is fun to watch. These youngsters have even been too astonished to say that Miss Stevens talks like her cousin, Mrs. Fiske. Perhaps, indeed, they have never seen Mrs. Fiske! For she, too, belongs back in the Golden Age. Isn't it just a little pathetic when a good play which merely does what a good play ought to do, excites such wonder and admiration because it does it? Isn't that a rather bitter commentary on the plays which must have preceded it?

Not long ago we wrote a little piece about the movies, and from our lofty ground of superior years and old-fashioned standards bewailed the fact that the stories they tell are trash. Rising up in defence of the movies comes a youngster, and with lance at rest, charges upon us full tilt in all the confidence of his youth. We know when to run. We know

that it is no use trying to fight youth. "Where on the American dramatic stage, in the past ten years, has Mr. Eaton seen *plays*, the plots of which weren't trash?" asks the boy, poking his lance into our ribs, before our lame old Rosinante can carry us away.

"The past ten years!" Oh, youth, youth! The past ten years is the decade of Cohan and Megrue, of Edna Ferber and Montague Glass, of Al. Woods and the Winter Garden. Fitch is dead, and Walter appears to have shot his bolt, and Moody has been cut off in his prime. The rising sun took a peep at theatrical conditions, saw a movie or two, and flopped back below the horizon. Yes, my lad, you are right—sadly we admit it. But it wasn't always so. Eleven years ago, now—! Or, say, twenty years ago, when you were rejoicing in your first knickbockers, ah, then it was different! Why, then we even used to see fine acting!

Acting! We went recently to "The Two Virtues," by Alfred Sutro, acted by Mr. Sothern at the Booth Theatre, and once more we felt "chilly and grown old." How old-fashioned Mr. Sothern impressed us as being—and Haidee Wright, too. Why, here was an actor supposed to be representing a man of intellectual force, of gracious manners, of sly humor, of breeding and charm. And Mr.

Sothern didn't once try the entire evening to look intellectual, or to show his gracious manners, or to be humorous, or to have the charm of breeding. It was a stupid performance. Any man of intellect, good manners, breeding, humor and charm, would have been just like him. He didn't act at all. He didn't act any more than Garrick did the night Partridge saw him play Hamlet. Any of our younger generation of actors can tell you that it is quite impossible to represent these things without trying very hard. Of course, off stage, a regular fellow isn't like that at all!

Another thing—Mr. Sothern had so much up his sleeve! Nowadays, when a player is called upon to let his voice out you suffer agony for fear he's going to snap a vocal chord. But when Mr. Sothern bellows "No"—why, it's not half so loud as he could shout it, and you feel quite easy. Again, he is called on to drop a pretty phrase—something about myrrh and honey—and instead of being ashamed of it he rolls it like a sweet morsel under the tongue and you hear an echo of Shakespearean iambics before your mind proceeds ahead with the play. Still again, for a second he drops his defence of banter and lets a single sentence of simple sincerity stab through—and like magic a tense hush falls on the

entire audience, and in a thousand throats the breath is caught. It is so easy for the big fellows. Who can do it today? Tell us their names, oh youth.

Well, well, there is an answer somewhere, and presently we shall go hopefully to work again and find it, but just for this evening we claim an old fellow's privilege to sit in the corner and growl. There is a certain comfortable feeling steals over you when you finally admit that you are middle-aged, after all, and resign to the youngsters the job of justifying the ways of the movies to man. The old fellow in "Fanny's First Play" said that for him England's anthem would always be "God Save the Queen." Some day our mistrustful lad will understand that speech. He cannot yet.

ON LETTING THE PLAYERS ALONE

1915

Last year, during the rehearsals of a play which was soon to be shown on Broadway, I talked with the actress who was to play the leading woman's part. She was, she said, in a state of great perplexity, because the author wished her to play the part in one way, the manager in another. "When the manager isn't there I play it the author's way," she said. "When he is there I play it his."

"But what are you going to do on the opening night?" I asked.

Her frown of perplexity vanished in one of those smiles which add fifty dollars a week to her salary. "Oh, I am going to play it my way then!" said she.

As a matter of fact, she did. As the play was a success, due in no small measure to her, she was allowed to continue so to do. But not all players are so clever, nor so daring, as she. William Winter, who when it came to acting knew a thing or two before most of us were born, always affirmed that

a great trouble with our latter-day stage management is the lack of liberty allowed the actors to develop their parts according to their personal vision and capacity. He was quite right, and the statement still holds true.

We generally think of David Belasco as our leading stage manager, certainly as our most painstaking and thorough stage manager. Yet I never talked with a player who had been under his tutelage who did not say proudly, "Why, he let me play my whole part for two weeks without telling me how to read a single line!" Some actors tell you this as a compliment to themselves, but some are wise enough to realize that in reality it is a compliment to Mr. Belasco. A man who has been in scores of plays under nearly every management in New York and several in continental Europe, told me the other day that there were only three real stage managers in America. Who the other two were, in his opinion, I refuse to divulge. Personally, I think there are at least a couple more. But the first, of course, was Belasco.

"I have just been rehearsing in a play staged by the author," said this actor, "and he has been showing all of us how to read his lines. He has spent hours showing us. The result will be that not a

one of us will give a self-realized, spontaneous, fluent performance. We shall all be more or less stiff, and some of the less experienced will approximate parrots. I consider that stage management at its very worst. Under Belasco the case is entirely different. He often lets you quite alone for days, even for weeks, at a time, allowing you to feel out the part in your own way, and trusting you to make it fit the general scheme of things by making the general scheme clear at all rehearsals. He believes, I suppose, that a man can do his best work only in his own way, not in another man's way. There would be nothing authentic about a composer's music if somebody told him just how he should write every bar. There would be nothing exactly inspired about the poetry of a poet who was told by somebody else how he must write every line. I've noticed there's not even any good criticism written on papers which dictate to their critics. An actor, too, in so far as he is an artist, a creator—and certainly you've got to admit he is one to some extent—must be allowed to do things in his own way if the things he does are to have the stamp of inspiration and authenticity. It is just as easy to detect the parrot in acting as in music or poetry.

"Well, Belasco understands that. He's like a

good editor who lets his staff be original, and so gets truly readable copy. Of course, he sometimes has to take a player in hand, and very often when the play reaches a point where the general effect is more important than the individual performances he will step in and make everyone conform to the effect he desires. But that is part of his excellence as a stage director, too. He keeps his units together, as well as letting each have individual freedom. When people talk of the fine acting in his plays, however, it usually means that it is spontaneous acting, each player having worked out more or less his own scheme for his part and therefore taking a vastly greater pride and interest in it."

Such is the substance of this experienced actor's remarks. We believe they are true words, and words which might well be pondered. A play is more or less a lifeless thing, at the mercy of the producer and the players. The line between success and failure is again and again crossed on one side or the other as the acting and production are good or bad. This season, for instance, "*The Boomerang*" at the Belasco Theatre is a great success; but it might easily have seemed nothing but a trite and trivial comedy at another theatre. The more delicate a work is, the more subtle, the more closely localized,

the finer its literary polish, the more dependent it becomes upon its production.

We have a great many people in this country engaged in the "business" of producing plays. We have surprisingly few genuine producers, who understand alike dramatic and literary values, and who are capable of appraising and giving instruction in the delicate art of acting. Just as a painter is impatient of any criticism save that of a fellow craftsman, a good actor quite naturally feels that perhaps he knows more about his own job than a layman. Certainly, he knows, as every other artist in every other branch of art knows, that self expression is the only kind worth striving for, and nothing worth while is ever achieved that isn't a form of self expression. To develop actors, the actors must be given a chance. To give them a chance under proper guidance, under guidance which will keep them in the bounds of the play and which they will respect, the stage managers must be artists—not necessarily actors, perhaps, though as a rule actors probably make the best stage directors—but certainly men of the theatre in the true sense, men whose interest is in the creation of artistic effects, not in "putting over" another winner.

The late Frank Worthing probably taught more

young players to act in his day than any score of stage managers. He taught Grace George, among others. He played a part as only he could, and the young actor playing with him strove not to read his lines as author or director might order, but as they should be read to fit into the rhythm of Worthing's performance. He (or she) strove to measure up to the art of that gifted player, and by feeling the spur of emulation and trying out what was learned in actual performance, made some of Worthing's art his own. Just so Mrs. Fiske has been known to tell a player in her company to go ahead and take the scene away from her if he could. That was a spur to make any player spurt. That was one reason why Mrs. Fiske's companies used to shine.

At any rate, one thing is certain; the ranks of the actors may or may not be overcrowded, but the ranks of the competent stage managers most assuredly are not. One has only to make the round of the New York theatres and see the horrid pitch-fork methods employed by the producers in most of them, to realize it. Probably at least twenty-five per cent (and possibly much more) of the failures in any one season are due to hasty and incompetent stage management. Just how great a loss this means in dollars and cents we leave it to the more statistically

minded to determine. It certainly means a great loss in pleasure and a serious handicap to the more noble forms of drama. Why the big producing firms do not select certain promising young men and train them up and try them out as stage managers is one of the mysteries of our theatre.

THE TEACHING OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE SCHOOLS

Spring 1916

Shakespeare died 300 years ago without the slightest consciousness that he had written textbooks for Phillips Academy and the New Rochelle High School. He passed from amid his daffodils and primroses—for in those last quiet years in the country I am sure he had especially the spring blooms about his dwelling—in the knowledge and belief that he had written plays for the practical theatre. That they commanded a wide interest he was not unaware; probably he was not unaware that they deserved it! He had already seen them put into print. But he had no “message,” as Shaw or Brieux has, and these quartos were, so to speak, souvenirs of a pleasant evening in the playhouse, or hints of a pleasant evening for those who were not present. Most assuredly they were not textbooks.

And it would take a bold man to deny the possibility of a connection between the modern decline of

✓ Shakespeare on the stage and the fact that his plays were never more generally in use as textbooks. More American children grow up today with a supposed knowledge of Shakespeare than ever before, and fewer ever see him acted—which simply means that fewer have any real knowledge of him.

It is an object of the tercentenary celebration not only to honor Shakespeare, but to focus attention upon all phases of his works, and I personally believe that no more useful result could possibly follow than a revaluation of Shakespearean study methods in our secondary schools, so complete in places as to be revolutionary. At present it is safe to say that the average high school makes Shakespeare a bore, and while it may teach enough routine of plot and smattering of philology to jam a child past the college entrance board, it fails utterly to inspire dramatic appreciation, to expand the imagination, to create affection. And the reason invariably is that Shakespeare's works are studied as textbooks, not as living dramatic performances spoken by living players. Conditions are not so bad as they were a few years ago, to be sure. The dramatic renaissance in our colleges is carrying down better equipped teachers into the secondary schools. But there is still a

vast deal to be done, and the present is an excellent opportunity for calling attention to it.

Most readers, I fancy, have gone through much the same experience that I went through in my school days—and they were spent in a great and famous school, too. We boys sat on benches with our red-bound Rolfe's editions before us, and in a sleepy singsong some boy droned out a passage, and then the instructor asked him questions to see if he'd read the notes, and then another boy recited and was questioned on the notes, and then the instructor, if he were feeling particularly energetic that day, gave us a bit of a lecture on the beauty of the poetry or on the character of Rosalind, and we openly yawned, and waited for the bell, and when it sounded rushed with a glad stamping into the open air. By virtue of much repetition, we learned that the quality of mercy is not strained, and we could repeat the plot of "Macbeth" in order to get into Yale. After which, we prayed to be delivered from the Bard! From a considerable observation of secondary schools since that time I gather that this is still the way Shakespeare is "taught" in too many places.

It is a crime, and doubly a crime now that we so pitifully need the right cultivation of dramatic

imagination and poetic appreciation to counteract the stultifying banality of the movies.

I am convinced that the first thing which should be thrown overboard in a preliminary teaching of Shakespeare to children of high school age is the notes. In their place should be substituted, by diagram, by pictures, and most of all, if it is a possible thing, by practical illustration, a clear image in the pupils' minds of the Elizabethan stage, of the actual conditions under which "Hamlet" or "Macbeth" or "The Merchant of Venice" first saw the light. This preliminary seems indispensable to me, for until the play to be studied is sensed in its practical relation to the theatre, until it is felt primarily as a living, acted story, it is ridiculous to expect children, or even untrained adults, to grasp its secondary significances. Moreover, through the dramatic sense lies the easiest and most natural approach to the child's interest; the method is pedagogically sound.

If I were teaching Shakespeare in a high school—and, I may add, I have taught him to many boys and girls of high school age, lest it be thought I am speaking purely from theory—I should first of all (after my talk on the Elizabethan theatre and my display of pictures and diagrams) have the desk removed from the platform, or shoved far back for a

“balcony.” I should then group some of the class at the sides as well as in front, and with as much merriment and informality as possible lead the class to play the teacher’s platform was Shakespeare’s stage and they the London audience. Then, picking boys and girls for the various parts, I should have them come up on this platform to read their rôles, act by act. No doubt the players would be changed frequently if the class were a large one. Everybody must have a chance.

No effort would be made, of course, to coach any pupils into acting, further than to keep them in the relative positions called for by the text, though a very definite effort would be made—and herein lies one of the finest opportunities of the Shakespearean teacher, and a neglected one—to coach each pupil to read his lines not only intelligently but rhythmically and with full voice and clean enunciation. Those who by nature threw themselves into acting would, of course, not be discouraged, but those who lacked the capacity or the self-assurance would not be made to feel that they were less useful or failing in their work. The main object to be achieved would be the creation in them all of a sense for the dramatic quality of the story, a realization of the dramatic drive and interest.

It should be possible thus to cover at least one act, possibly two, at each recitation, and I should go through the entire play in this manner before a single word was said about the notes at the back of the book. I should make that particular play a living, vital tale to every child, as vital as the movies around the corner, before I turned to the notes at all. I should abolish most of the formality and discipline of the conventional classroom, and have a grand good time in the process.

Then, and only then, should I turn back to the text and go through it as classroom work, demanding a knowledge of the notes, elucidating the simpler and most necessary problems of philology, and discussing *with* (not *at*) the pupils the characters of Shylock or Hamlet or Rosalind. And even during this work, at every possible opportunity the teacher ought to make reference to this or that famous performance in the past, show pictures of Booth and Sothern and Marlowe, keep in every possible way the stage side of the play before the pupils' minds. It is only by bringing out the dramatic element that the growing mind can grasp Shakespeare in his true significance and interest. It is only by a practical demonstration of the platform stage that the school child can acquire the capacity for historic projec-

tion, the ability, that is, to view with comprehension in one century the works of a previous century, created for totally different conditions. And it is only by keeping Shakespeare a living, spoken thing, not a dry, printed text, that a love can be fostered for verbal beauty on the stage of the present, for the chiming of the spoken word, the strut and sweep of poetic passion.

By following some such method of teaching as this I think nearly as many plays can be got through with in a year as by the old methods, and I am very sure if only half as many are covered, twice as much will actually be accomplished. I have certainly demonstrated to my own satisfaction, by a considerable series of experiments, not only that the average mixed class of small-town high school children can be made to enjoy Shakespeare by this method, but that they will thereafter voluntarily and delightedly come through snow and slush of an evening to read, in the same way, the plays of Sheridan, Goldsmith, Lady Gregory, even G. B. Shaw. I have had a dozen boys and girls howling joyously over "You Never Can Tell" in my library, and I have the next week had them all around the piano singing "Patience" and "The Mikado." They didn't ask to "rag" the music, either! After all, that is a better

gauge of education than a high percentage in the college entrance tests. We do not study to pass examinations, but to expand our capacities for useful living and rational enjoyment. Any pupil who gets a mark of 100 per cent. in Shakespeare, but thereafter hates the plays, has not "passed" brilliantly; he has dismally failed—or, rather, his teacher has.

Coincident with some such method as this for teaching Shakespeare in many cases might very well be an actual performance of one of his plays (in whole or in part) by the pupils. It is impossible to say how many amateur productions are made by public and private secondary schools in America during a year, but the total is undoubtedly up in the thousands. In a great many instances, the pupils are allowed to pick their own play without any helpful suggestions, and naturally wanting something "snappy" or amusing, they pick some cheap farce and waste their time over the most direful rubbish. Quite aside from the fact that any self-respecting Principal ought to be ashamed to let his school be represented by anything short of the best standards, the school is losing thereby an excellent chance to combine its educational functions with the spontaneous impulses of the children. If they have been properly taught, the pupils themselves will know

that Shakespeare wrote quite as jovial farce as anybody else, and that one of his plays offers them the fullest opportunities for showing off the capacities of everybody in the class. And to the teacher it means the culmination of her efforts to vitalize the text.

It is safe to say that a school performance of Shakespeare should be made either on a platform stage, as nearly Elizabethan as the resources permit, or else out of doors. If the former method is chosen, both pupils and public should be impressed with the fact that the school is trying to do something historical, to show Shakespeare in an approximation of his original dress. It is perfectly proper for a school production to have a touch of the educational about it, especially as in that way the terrible obstacle of scenery is overcome. The platform stage is easily made, requires no curtain, has the charm of novelty, and centres the attention on the spoken word. It can be appropriately dressed at the rear, also, with cloth hangings, rugs, tapestries, to relieve its bareness and give it color. The New Theatre's production of "*A Winter's Tale*" proved that.

So far as practicable, the costumes should be made by the children themselves, and at the least possible

cost. It should be a matter of pride to make a pretty dress out of cheesecloth for sixty-five cents, rather than to present a sumptuous appearance in velvet and gold. Every possible phase of the school curriculum—drawing, music, sewing, manual training—should be applied to the preparation of the stage, the costumes, the play, not only to reduce expenses, but far more to connect the school work with reality, to correlate it, to give every pupil a useful part to play. Happily, there are already many high schools where this is realized, and even one or two where the pupils have actually assisted in building a permanent school theatre.

The same methods hold true, of course, for the out-of-door performance, which in many sections of the country is the more desirable. Not only is the out-of-door performance, under good conditions, apt to be more illusive, especially if given at night, but it has a peculiar beauty of its own, and it permits the utilization of more players and the arrangement of pretty dances.

An entire school can contribute. I have in mind at this moment a performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" given by a little West Virginia high school at the instigation of the English teacher, a graduate of Radcliffe College, where she had felt

the inspiration of the new dramatic renaissance. The boys cut young firs on the mountain and made a stage in a corner of the school yard, screening out unsightly objects beyond and creating masked wings and entrances. The girls made all the costumes. Their natural love of dancing was utilized to the full. Everybody contributed something, even the grade children. And on a June day all the population of the little town gathered to watch the play, seeing and hearing something far different from anything the movies provide. The sixteenth century touched hands with the twentieth across the years in this mountain village, and the thrill of eternal loneliness awoke. What a splendid thing for a school to do! That is the real way to teach Shakespeare.

While the superior educational advantages of doing a thing yourself instead of having it done for you can never be overestimated, at the same time we should never lose sight of the stimulus of professional example and the standard such example sets. In the study of Shakespeare there is as yet almost no official recognition of the aid the professional theatre could, and should, give to the public schools. Some form of co-operation between the two should be brought about, and doubtless will be

as time goes on and our theatre is better adapted to such service.

There is probably hardly a reader of this article who does not treasure among his most precious memories certain trips to the playhouse when he was of school age. In my own case, I know, the performances of Dickens dramatizations by the old Boston Museum Stock Company had more to do with my development of a love for reading and appreciation of character portrayal than anything else. The other day a man told me of a boys' club he organized some years ago, outside of Boston. Miss Maude Adams sent him twenty seats to "Peter Pan," and he took the whole club. Ten years later, talking with those same boys, it was that trip to Boston to see "Peter Pan" which every one of them most vividly remembered and talked about. Moreover, many of them had been to see Miss Adams's revival of the play, and one and all were still her ardent champions. Just so those of us who saw Julia Marlowe's Juliet when we were schoolboys have never forgotten it, but treasure in our hearts a fragrant memory, like a precious standard of loveliness and poetry.

But how is this co-operation between school and stage to come about? the reader asks. Especially

how is it to come about in the small towns where there are no theatres?

Very often, of course, for the small towns, the thing is impossible, making the more need for such amateur productions as that in West Virginia, described above. But in the larger towns, and in the smaller places adjacent to them, a little co-operation between theatre managers and school authorities could in a surprisingly large number of cases bring about an opportunity for the high school pupils to see Shakespeare professionally performed. Not only are there several companies touring the country who are equipped to give Shakespeare out of doors, but anything like a concerted demand for winter performances would keep these companies as permanent organizations during the year. Moreover, even today, though the average stock company has sunk to a rather low level of accomplishment, the right encouragement from the school and municipal authorities would find most of the directors ready to respond with occasional matinées.

Certainly, nothing could be better for the theatre than the creation of a sentiment in the community that it is not only a luxury, a means of idle amusement, but also a factor in the educational life of the town, an adjunct of the schools. Let your rising

generation of school children come to regard the playhouse in their town as a fascinating part of their school study, and you have made vastly easier for the next generation the task which faces us—the task of freeing the American theatre from the bondage of Broadway, of revitalizing it and localizing it in each separate community. One of the ways to accomplish this end, and one of the surest ways, is to make the theatre contributory to our prized national institution, the public schools. The advantage will be mutual.

THE VEXED QUESTION OF PERSONALITY

1916

No branch of art is so much discussed, in print and in conversation, as the art of acting, and none, perhaps, is so little understood. Those, presumably, who know the most about it, the actors, either give out silly utterances to Sunday newspaper interviewers, or else their words are embalmed in such papers as William Gillette's "Illusion of the First Time in Acting," or Coquelin's "Art and the Actor," or Talma's "Reflections on Acting," which are, in this country at least, unknown to the general public, and some of them only available in such special editions as those published by the Columbia Dramatic Museum. Even those ardent culture seekers, the American club women, who study earnestly in preparation for a symphony, would never dream of reading Coquelin's essay before going to see Billie Burke or Maude Adams. However, that doesn't in the least deter them from expressing an opinion,

ex cathedra, regarding the merit of the performance. Unfortunately, the average newspaper criticism is in little better state. The critic usually devotes nine-tenths of his space to the play, dismissing the players sometimes with that one awful word, "adequate," and but seldom writing definitely and illuminatingly of the actor's art. One reason for this is, of course, that so few dramatic critics remain at their posts long enough to become competent to discuss acting. Talma says it requires twenty years to learn how to act. We are disposed to think it requires hardly less time to learn how to analyze acting critically. The present writer has been a critic for nearly fifteen years, and, if he may make a confession, always attends a Shakespearean performance with a sinking heart, because he has not seen enough different impersonations of these great characters to give him an adequate basis of comparison. How can one write adequately of Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet, for example, who never saw Booth's? Each may have been an unique creation, but it is by what one actor can find in a part which another does not find that the critic learns judgment.

One of the commonest confusions in the appreciation of acting is that created by the thing called Personality. Nobody disputes that personality

plays an enormous part in the popular success of an actor or actress, sometimes the most important part. But to differentiate between the actor with a strong personality who is also an artist, and one who is not an artist, frequently overtaxes the lay critic; while the dispute has never ceased to rage whether the use of a strong personality is "legitimate" or not. You can hear it every day. Only recently every paper in London has been writing about the charming "personality" of the American actress, Doris Keane, who is playing "Romance" in that capital, to the immense delight of the soldiers home on leave. They also add, almost invariably in another sentence, that she can act. To very few writers does it seem to occur that the revelation of this personality in the theatre may be itself the most artful feature of her performance.

What is the end and aim of acting? It is not to repeat the author's lines. It is not to give propulsion to the events of the author's story. *It is to bring to life the author's characters.* Now, in the actual world, the character does not exist devoid of personality—a quality we need hardly try to define, since it eludes definition, but is perfectly well recognized by everybody. The most interesting people are those with the most interesting personalities. A

colorless person we say has little personality. Theodore Roosevelt bristles with it, however tired some of us get with his brand. Therefore, on the stage, the most interesting characters in the play are bound to be those for whom the author has imagined the most vivid and interesting personalities. But the grim fact confronts the actor about to assume one of these rôles that you cannot create personality by putting on a wig, reciting speeches, carrying a cane, aping certain gestures, donning a hoop skirt. In fact, you cannot create personality at all. You can train and direct it, you can even develop it, perhaps, as so many men unconsciously do who give their lives to a certain occupation; we all know doctors who, from much association with sickness, have developed a natural gentleness till it shines from their faces and is the best medicine they administer! But God and his grandparents gave the actor, as well as every other man, what potential personality he may possess, and *it is this personality of his own* which he has got to use in creating a live stage character. If he succeeds in giving you, in the audience, a complete illusion of being that stage personage, it may, of course, be a happy accident, merely—i.e. his own personality may be exactly that of the stage part. Such an occurrence is not uncommon. But, much

more often, it means that the player has used his personality as one of the best weapons of his art, and is showing you, did you but know it, a very fine piece of craftsmanship. He is fusing his personality with that of the character, and by his own native resources vitalizing the dramatist's conception.

It is perfectly true, as the London papers all remarked, that Doris Keane has a pronounced personality. It was just as pronounced in the second part she played, years ago, the seduced maiden in Henry Arthur Jones' drama, "The Hypocrites," the part which made her known to the public. But this part was totally different from her rôle in "Romance." She was unmistakably Doris Keane in both impersonations—and she was as unmistakably the characters in the two plays. How shall we explain the paradox? Billie Burke would have been Billie Burke in both plays, because she cannot act. Miss Keane, no less individual, contrives to give the illusion of two contrasted women.

Well, that is one of the mysteries of the actor's art, which even so skilled a player as George Arliss throws too little light upon, in his introduction to William Gillette's "Illusion of the First Time of Acting." He does suggest that the mysterious thing

we call personality is made up, say, of a hundred elements. Now it may well be that only ten of these elements are needed to assume the guise of a character. The other ninety remain in the actor as a reserve force, to be drawn upon to give charm and vitality to his impersonation. Only, alas! Mr. Arliss doesn't tell us how the drawing is accomplished. Perhaps it is too much a matter of instinct to describe. Miss Keane, let us say, has dark, magnetic eyes, a curious mouth that is extremely mobile and can suggest either impish glee or profound sorrow very easily (Elsie Ferguson is another actress with a peculiarly expressive mouth), and a general attractiveness of face and figure which arrests attention. Having arrested our attention, we soon realize other features of her personality, notably her humor, not without its capacity for a sarcastic edge, her sensitiveness to impressions, her alert mind. We sense her as rather an unusual person. Now, to play her rôle of the seduced maiden in "*The Hypocrites*," she needed only to color her dark eyes a little darker with mournfulness, maintain the droop to her mouth, and by her sensitiveness to the atmosphere of the part keep properly in the picture—and she had created the illusion of character by using only a fraction of her natural weapons. The rest

remained to her in reserve, subtly to give interest and vitality to her impersonation.

In "Romance" she drew much more fully on her natural resources, especially on her humor, her capriciousness, the sense of strangeness in her personality. But even in "Romance" she did not tap the capacity for sarcasm and only partially the suggestion of mental alertness which we could always feel behind her stage characters if she chose to let us, inherent in the actress herself. It is because her personality is so rich, and because she has demonstrated the technical expertness to utilize those sides of it properly adapted to each character she plays, that we have faith in her future impersonations.

Many years ago Mrs. Fiske, an actress with the most striking and electric personality now visible on our stage, gave a heart-breaking performance of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," which was greatly admired by the public, but which was, none the less, widely attacked by the critics, lay as well as professional, because "it wasn't Thomas Hardy's Tess." Her personality, the critics said, was not suited to Hardy's Tess. It certainly was not. Nobody knew that better than the actress herself. If she hadn't known it, and also known exactly what her personality *was* suited for, she would have tried to give

an imitation of Hardy's Tess, and made a miserable mess of it. Tess of the novel was unquestionably bovine, and Mrs. Fiske is about as bovine as a thistle-down in a northwest gale. Tess had a certain peasant stupidity. Mrs. Fiske's personality suggests mental alertness to such a degree that she cannot possibly simulate stupidity convincingly. Her problem, then, was to make the Tess of the play the kind of a woman she could plausibly impersonate, so that her personality could give life to the part. She had every right to do this—or else acting is not an art at all, but a process of mechanical reproduction, like a phonograph. For peasant stupidity she substituted innocence and wistful trustfulness; for the bovine quality she substituted fragility, nervous sensitiveness; for the passionate dumbness of Tess's longings, she substituted a taut-wire emotionalism.

Thus, in the same set of circumstances, the same tragic workings of Fate were plausibly brought about, the same terrible lesson was read. Her Tess was no less a human creature in the fell clutch of circumstance than Hardy's maiden. Here was an almost perfect example of an actor's realization that he cannot get away from his own personality, and that to succeed greatly in the theatre he must by

every device of art use his personality to give life and illusion to his rôle.

Mrs. Fiske's Tess was not so satisfactory a performance as her Becky Sharp, however, because Becky's personality and hers have two things so wonderfully in common—an ironic sense of humor (which had to be suppressed entirely in Tess), and the dynamic magnetism of a sleepless will. Mrs. Fiske all her life has been a fighter. She fought the Theatrical Syndicate singlehanded after everybody else had knuckled under. All her life she has been a worker, the first at rehearsals, the last to leave. Indeed, resolution, will power, bottled energy, radiate from her little person when she chooses to release them, and ring in her bitten tones. Therefore with no effort she took Becky to her bosom. And, by the same token, she ought by rights to be the great Lady Macbeth of our generation.

To go back a little, all the evidence of his contemporaries and of those who still remember him, points to the fact that Booth's Hamlet, perhaps the greatest achievement of the American theatre, was a happy wedding of technical skill and a personality marvelously akin to the personality generally associated with the poet's Prince. Booth played other parts well, though none so well. But there were

parts he played badly—and they were the ones which he could not bend to his personality. His great eminence, his Hamlet, was a work of genius—but the genius was only in part artful. It was Nature which put him on the ultimate pedestal. And, in our day, how much of the charm of Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet comes from his exquisite elocution, his finished rhythm of performance, his intelligent insight into character, and how much from that rare and princely bearing with which Nature has endowed him, from the splendid gentlemanliness of his personality? To say that an actor who has such a gift is less of an artist because he uses it is to say that Melba is less of an artist than the village soprano because she had the most glorious voice of her generation.

He would be an ungracious and boorish critic indeed who said that Maude Adams, so universally beloved for two decades on our stage, did not deserve the rewards she has won, because she received them as a tribute to her personality rather than her art. Indeed, one may almost say that her personality is her art. A personality so winsome and lovely as hers is itself a work of genius—be it the Lord's or not. Miss Adams, of course, knows how to act, up to a certain point. But her range is limited. She

speaks very badly, her attempts at Shakespeare were almost pathetic, and she mispronounces the English language atrociously. Even in the plays of her favorite Barrie, she sometimes curiously fails to grasp a character, as in the earlier acts of "What Every Woman Knows." The first act of "The Legend of Leonora" called for a technical virtuosity quite beyond her range. As Juliet, many years ago, she was pitifully feeble in emotional suggestion—the grand passions are beyond her powers. Yet, in "The Little Minister," a play almost twenty years old, she packed the Empire Theatre all last winter, and nobody would want to see any other actress play "Peter Pan." As Barrie is called "whimsical," Miss Adams is most often called "elfin." There is something in her personality everybody recognizes, everybody loves, and when she finds a part to which she can give illusion by this personality of hers—an elfin part, as it were, with a sweet dash of tenderness and womanly humor and wistfulness now and then—she is incomparable. She makes her slender technical resources go as far as they can, and the Maude Adams God made does the rest.

How much personality limits even the most technically expert of players is well illustrated by the case of Sarah Bernhardt. She knew every trick of

the actor's art; so marvelous was her command of them, indeed, that she could play the boyish hero of "L'Aiglon" when she was over sixty, and now, a feeble old woman on a wooden leg, she can stand leaning on a table and evoke with her voice alone the tragic passions. Yet, as William Winter once remarked with rare penetration, in all her impersonations of women she was always the woman being loved, never the woman loving. Illusion always broke down at that point, failed of completeness. It was a fatal defect of her personality.

Again, both Julia Marlowe and Margaret Anglin have played Cleopatra, and the present writer saw both performances. Neither woman could create the illusion, for all her skill. A certain inescapable ladylikeness, the scent of the Anglo-Saxon lily, clung 'round them still. Miss Anglin especially was a splendid Katherine in "The Taming of the Shrew." There was nothing in her personality to contradict tremendous temper and rebellious spirit. Indeed, her personality suggests always a woman of strong spirit, averse to leading strings. But as you and I know Egypt's queen, a certain exoticness is demanded, and neither Miss Marlowe nor Miss Anglin could find in her own personality the right qualities to call to her aid. Nazimova, that "tiger cat in the

leash of art," might play it, so far as personality goes. Then there would be no clash between player and part. On the other hand, can you fancy Nazimova as *Viola*? If it is right for actors to avoid parts for which their personalities are unsuited—and common sense tells us that it is—it is equally right for them to make the most of their personalities in parts they are suited for.

The reader can easily call to mind for himself a list of players with strong personalities, and can reflect on what use they have made of them—whether a crude, artless use, such as Billie Burke makes and Ethel Barrymore is this season making in "*Our Mrs. McChesney*" (more's the pity), or a vital, artful use, such as that fine actor Ernest Lawford always makes, or Ferdinand Gottschalk, or George Arliss. Ferdinand Gottschalk, an extremely individual and eccentric little comedian, who couldn't disguise himself if he tried, yet played the silly ass in "*The Climbers*" to the life, and in "*The Truth*" played the father in such a way that through the foppishness and weakness and vanity of the old man shone the remnants of a gentleman, and gave the whole play its meaning. Gottschalk, an artist and a gentleman, had only to tap his personality a little deeper, to draw on those reserve forces Arliss speaks of, and the second char-

acter came to life, though almost in the exterior, superficial image of the first. That is personality governed and utilized by art.

O. P. Heggie, an excellent English actor who came to us as Androcles in the Granville Barker production of "Androcles and the Lion," is this spring playing the old clerk, Cokeson, in Galsworthy's "Justice." The two parts are totally unlike, save in one respect. Both Androcles and Cokeson should command our loving, if smiling, sympathy, they should have a certain quality of gentleness about them. And Heggie's own personality, as it appears on the stage, is remarkable for just this winning quality. You could never for an instant confuse one character with the other as he plays them, but neither could you fail, if you had seen Heggie as Androcles, to recognize him as Cokeson. He has obediently carried out the author's intention, but he has artfully employed his own personality to accomplish the final bringing to life of the character.

It is one of the creeds of modern criticism that all art is, in the final analysis, but an expression of personality, of the artist's personality, of his vision of life. Even the drama, the most objective of the arts, the one in which the writer has least to say in his own person, cannot escape the law. Though

Aristotle called the drama an imitation, we see today behind the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides the two vivid and contrasting personalities of the poets, their different visions of life. Their plays are not imitations but revelations. Behind "Justice" and "Peter Pan" and "Major Barbara" we feel the three personalities of Galsworthy, Barrie and Shaw, and if we had never heard a word of gossip about these men, nor seen a picture of them, nor read anything else they had written, we would yet know them for what they are. There is, indeed, something almost terrible to the artist when he realizes the self-revelation he makes to the world when he wields a brush or blots white paper with black ink.

And shall we deny to the actor and the interpretative musician the name of artist? Whether we wish to or not, I fear it cannot be done. Personally, if the actor is not an artist but a mere recording machine, I would wish never to write another line about acting. And if the public thought the interpretative musicians were not artists—that Sembrich and Kreisler and Paderewski and Muck are but recording instruments, phonographs on legs—I am very sure the concert halls would be deserted. The instinct of the public is right, of course, as it always is in the long run.

But if the actor and the singer or violinist are artists, if they contribute a creative act by their performance, then what they do, too, in the last analysis, must be to reveal their personalities, their visions of the world. They, too, cannot escape the self-revelation. When Sembrich sings Schumann's Bride Songs as no one but she can sing them, she contributes the revelation of her own womanliness. When the Kneisels play a Beethoven sonata they contribute the revelation of their leader's love of form and fine reverence for beauty. When any actor gives a splendid performance of an interesting character, from Hamlet to the latest hero of the current stage, he adds something to the author's conception, he contributes the vitality and the interest of his own personality, not merely in exterior aspect (he may conceivably quite disguise that), but in far subtler ways. So Booth and Forbes-Robertson both made Hamlet live again, and without violence to Shakespeare—because they were artists, intent on the interpretation of a character; yet each contributed something rare and precious and unique, which perished when he ceased to act. That something was his own personality, his vision, the thing he himself was as a man. If this were not so, and if the actors did not know it were so, it is inconceivable that anybody

with an ounce of brains would ever go on the stage, or survive the debasing mechanism more than six months if he did. And if this were not so, it would not be true—as it unquestionably is true—that the finest performances come from the players who can add to the proper technical equipment the most varied, interesting, profound and admirable personalities.

THE LESSON OF THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PLAYERS

1916

This is the story of the Washington Square Players and their experiment at the little Bandbox Theatre in New York. It is told here because it illustrates better than any other experiment yet tried in the American theatre the vitalizing influence of the amateur spirit, and points the way toward possible provincial theatres in various sections of the land, conducted not from Broadway but by local artists, and democratically serving the local community. Its success is the success of youth, enthusiasm, ideals, intelligence—and democracy. And the greatest of these is democracy. You cannot have a successful, i.e. a vital theatre, or any other vital art expression, just because a few rich people decide to have it. You cannot superimpose art, or morals, or anything else, from above. Your theatre must grow from the desires of the workers in the theatre, and the audiences in the theatre. That is the way the Washingt-

ton Square Players began. They started in poverty, and they are comparatively poor yet. We hope they always will be. Then the workers in their theatre will always be its lovers. We don't want them to work for nothing; but better for nothing than for great riches.

It was during the winter of 1914-15 that a group of young people, mostly living in the region around old Washington Square in New York, conceived the idea, or at least crystallized the idea, of starting a theatre of their own. Very few of them had ever acted, except as amateurs. Several of them, however, had written plays and were filled with a perfectly natural desire to see these plays on a stage. Others were artists who viewed the Broadway theatres with some contempt, perhaps, because of the old-fashioned settings and costumes they saw there. Still others were young men who had ambitions to stage plays. Some of these men and women were Hebrews, some belonged to the much-written-about Greenwich Village Bohemian crowd, some, like Samuel Eliot, Jr., grandson of the president-emeritus of Harvard, were positively Puritanic in antecedents. But one thing they had in common—a love of and enthusiasm for the theatre. No, there was another thing—none of them seems to have had any capital.

However, they were young, and full of faith enough not to let that fact bother them.

Calling themselves the Washington Square Players, they found the chance to rent a small theatre three miles from Washington Square, far off the beaten track, on East 57th Street beyond Third Avenue. This theatre had been erected for use by professional actors, whose venture had speedily failed; and it could be rented cheaply. So the Washington Square Players moved in. They had chosen as their head director a young man named Edward Goodman. They had selected three one-act plays and a pantomime for their opening bill, painted some scenery and designed some costumes, all without any relation to the way plays are chosen or scenery painted on Broadway; and they had drilled a group of players to act these pieces as well as they could, which, to confess the truth, wasn't very well.

They announced their first performance for February 19, 1915, and said they would give but two performances a week, on Friday and Saturday evenings. They did not advertise in the newspapers—not having enough money. And they did not pay their actors anything, doubtless for the same reason. All seats were to be fifty cents each, none higher.

The first performance came off on schedule, and there were plenty of friends on hand to fill the theatre. The newspaper critics journeyed over to the wilds east of Third Avenue also, curious to see what was going to happen, but probably not very hopeful. Your average critic has learned by bitter experience the futility of hope.

But the critics had a shock. Two of the three one-act plays presented were original works, "Licensed," by Basil Lawrence, the story of an erring girl and a pastor who took pity on her; and "Eugenically Speaking," by Edward Goodman, the director, an extremely racy satire on eugenics, done with an engaging frankness which made it quite different from the professional attempts at salaciousness made occasionally over on Broadway. The third play was Maeterlinck's haunting little study of death and stillness, "Interior," very imaginatively and effectively staged at a cost of \$35.00. The bill ended with a pantomime called "Another Interior," the stage representing the interior of the human stomach, the hero being Gastric Juice, and the villains the various courses consumed at a dinner. Brave Gastric overthrew them one by one, though with failing strength, till at last he fell a victim to a particularly vividly colored cordial.

On the whole, the acting was amateur. But the plays themselves were all vital, full of meaning, or full of racy fun, and the settings were unusual and arresting. The critics went away delighted. Here was something fresh and new and different! The next night the theatre was again sold out. And it was sold out for every succeeding performance, though a third performance a week was soon added.

On March 26th the second bill was staged. The chief feature was Leonid Andreyev's satire, "Love of One's Neighbor," translated from the Russian, and the players were not quite up to the demands. They did better with "Moon Down," a sketch of two girls in a hall bedroom, by John Reed, "My Lady's Honor," by Murdock Pemberton, and "Two Blind Beggars and One Less Blind," by Philip Moeller, one of the producing staff of the theatre. They did better still with a pretty pantomime, cleverly staged in black and white, called "The Shepherd in the Distance."

The third bill was disclosed on May 7th, and included Maeterlinck's youthful and amusing satire, "The Miracle of St. Anthony," "April," a play of tenement house life by Rose Pastor Stokes, "Forbidden Fruit," a French amorous trifle adapted from Octave Feuillet, and, finally, "Saviors," a sketch

written by Edward Goodman, of a mother and son and their attitude toward the son's desire to marry his mistress.

The season closed on Decoration Day, but not before one new production had been made, a translation of Tchekov's "The Bear." This play, together with the three most popular plays on the preceding bills—"Eugenically Speaking," "Interior" and "The Shepherd in the Distance"—made up the fourth bill for the final performances.

In the first season, then, from February 19th to May 30th, 1915, the Washington Square Players had given forty-three performances of fourteen one-act plays and pantomimes, all but five of these being original native work. Two of the foreign plays were by Maeterlinck, two from the Russian and one from the French. All of them had been mounted simply but for the most part effectively and in the new manner. The chief weakness lay in the acting, yet the plays had sufficient vitality, the whole experiment sufficient zest and novelty, to attract patronage, and to encourage the Players to reengage the Bandbox Theatre for another year.

Their second season began on October 4th, 1915. During the summer the company had been somewhat augmented, with the most promising actors of the

spring as a nucleus. There were, then, in October, about twenty-five men and women, almost without exception young, forming the active players. The producers, stage hands, even the treasurer of the theatre, were called in for mob scenes, and "extra people." All told perhaps, counting the scene painters, costume designers, business managers and producers the Washington Square Players numbered now about fifty. For the second season, the price of seats in a large portion of the house was raised to one dollar, to enable the payment of salaries to the leading actors and workers, for it was determined to give six performances a week, and the regular performers could not afford to donate so much of their time. In other words, the theatre determined to become self-supporting. A few professional players were also secured, including Lydia Lopoukova, now with the Russian Ballet, and Frank Conroy, formerly with Benson's company in England.

The first bill, acted on October 4th, did not disclose any great advance in acting ability, however, though the acquisition of Mr. Conroy was a help. But it did disclose one play of unusual quality, "*Helena's Husband*," by Philip Moeller, a satiric burlesque on Helen of Troy which kept the audience in gales of merriment, and which has since

been played in other theatres through the country. The other plays on the program (all of one act, as before) were "Fire and Water," by Hervey White, a war sketch showing how French and German soldiers, between the lines, may be very good friends, "The Antick," by Percy Mackaye, and "Night of Snow," translated from the Italian of Roberto Bracco. This last play, after two weeks, was replaced by a revival of "Interior." Business started off briskly, and remained good for a couple of weeks. Then it began to fall off.

The second bill for the season was produced on November 8th, and was called "a program of Comparative Comedy." It included Schnitzler's clever play, "Literature," (not very well acted), Bracco's "Honorable Lover," de Musset's "Whims" (very inadequately acted, it being a work only skilled professional comedians could make interesting in English), and finally, "Overtones," by Alice Gerstenberg of Chicago. This, the only native play on the bill, proved easily the most interesting, and was the best acted. Two women, shadowed by their real selves, or "overtones," meet and talk. They say one thing, their real selves say what they really would say if they spoke their minds. It was a clever sketch, and has since been acted at the Indianapolis

Little Theatre and elsewhere, even, we believe, in vaudeville.

It was not till the third bill was presented, on January 10th, 1916, that the Players began to show the fruits of sustained practice in acting, and gave a performance which could compare with professional work. And at the same time, it should be noted, public patronage began to be more steady and full houses every night the rule. Ultimately, no experimental theatre can succeed until it develops a company of players who can act. Enthusiasm, clever plays, picturesque and novel scenery, will never be a permanent substitute for acting. In the long run the theatre rests on the actors' art, a fact which can never be ignored by the founders of experiments.

The third bill was most notable for a play by Lewis Beach, one of Professor Baker's graduates at Harvard, called "The Clod." It was adroitly acted, especially by Miss Josephine Meyer, from the start a most useful member of the company. This tense and thrilling little piece, perhaps the best one-act play written in America in some years, showed a mean border farm during our Civil War, at night. The old farmer and his wife were the only occupants. War had left them nothing, even robbing them of sleep. A Union despatch rider, closely pursued,

enters, and the action so befalls that the old woman hides him to avoid trouble with his two Confederate pursuers. These pursuers demand food from her, which she dumbly gets, but when one of them insults her, calling her a clod and worse, something in her snaps and she shoots them both dead at point blank range with a shotgun. The Union soldier hails her as the savior of an army corps, as a patriot. But all it means to her is some broken crockery and the loss of a needed night's sleep. The play is rich in suspense, in theatrical excitement, and richer in spiritual suggestion. It is a little masterpiece.

The other plays on this bill were "The Road House in Arden," a fantastic skit about Shakespeare and Lord Bacon, the scene occurring at a road house kept by Hamlet and his wife Cleopatra; a translation of Wedekind's cynical sketch of the artistic temperament, "The Tenor"; and, finally, a rather stupid and poorly performed pantomime called "The Red Cloak."

The fourth bill, presented on March 20th, was marked by a still more noticeable improvement in acting, and a consequent increase in public patronage. Three plays were original works, and all three were performed with precision. The first was a thriller by Guy Bolton and Tom Carlton (the former being

a playwright for the professional theatre), called "Children," in which a negro mother shoots her son dead rather than give him up to a lynching party. The second was an amusing satire on divorce, called "The Age of Reason," by Cecil Dorrian. Two little girls in knee length frocks and hair ribbons talk like the characters in a Wilde play, and finally put the about-to-be-divorced parents of one of them on trial. It is merry fooling, and not without some point. The third original play was "The Magical City," written in *vers libre* by Zoë Akins, and mounted in a setting of great beauty, quite worthy of such professional designers as Joseph Urban or Livingston Platt. The scenery, however, left a more definite impression than the play, which seemed to be trying to capture the poetic glamor of Gotham and its wealth, the glamor which snares certain women and makes them the mistresses of the money kings. Somehow, realism seems the proper treatment for this theme. At any rate, "The Magical City" didn't persuade us that it isn't. But the production of the play was certainly an attempt at a different and more intense handling of a sordid Broadway story, and so needs no defense. The bill ended with a version of the old 15th century French farce, "Master Pierre Patelin," one of the earliest known examples of the

modern drama as it was emerging from the Middle Ages, and one of the best. Unfortunately, the Washington Square Players, instead of acting this piece in its integrity and preserving its historic flavor, cut it unmercifully and acted it in a kind of animated puppet style. The result was neither amusing nor educative. They would much better have left it alone. However, some errors in judgment must be allowed to everybody, especially to young folks and pioneers.

On May 7th, 1916, the Players acted for the first time a long play, Maeterlinck's "*Aglavaine and Selysette*." This performance, however, was not repeated, as it was a special production for the season subscribers and was not intended for the public. It need not concern us here, though it is only fair to state that the scenery was unusual in design and full of beauty and suggestion.

The last bill of the season was presented on May 22, and again a long play was chosen, Marian Fell's translation of Tchekhov's "*The Sea Gull*." This play was continued until June 1st, when the Players moved from the tiny Bandbox Theatre to the Comedy Theatre near Broadway, and there presented a few of their most successful productions until the coming of hot weather. They have leased the Com-

edy for the season of 1916-17, needing its ampler stage for their scenic experiments, and its ampler seating capacity for their revenue.

The production of "The Sea Gull," it must be admitted, gave more practice to the players than pleasure to the audience. Frankly, it was too much for their still immature histrionic powers. The plays of Tchekhov are almost unknown on the American stage, and while we must applaud the courage of the Washington Square Players in attempting to remedy this lack, we cannot help feeling that no great rush to the Russian dramatist will follow. "The Sea Gull," to be sure, is lucidity itself by comparison with "The Cherry Garden," but by comparison with life as we know it in our native drama even "The Sea Gull" is a book sealed seven-fold. Not its sluggish back water of dramatic progression, not even its pictures of alien society, perplex us, but rather its Chinese puzzle of irrelevancies. No character in it can stick to one idea for more than two speeches, and no character in it has any will, unless poor Constantine may be said to have the will to die. Lack of will, lack of concentration —the two are really the same. Tchekhov, with uncanny felicity, makes an ironic nightmare of these negative traits in his countrymen. A Russian wom-

an once told me that "The Cherry Garden" is so intensely Russian that she herself could not understand it after she had lived eight years in America. "The Sea Gull" differs only in degree. We whose modern philosopher is William James, with his "Will to Believe," and who still applaud Emerson's "Trust thyself, every heart vibrates to that iron string," can have small comprehension of, or even stomach for, a play like "The Sea Gull."

And to make it at all impressive, certainly, a very high grade of subtle acting is required, not in one or two parts, but in all. Tchekhov never hitched his wagon to a star! It would be futile to analyze the performance given at the Bandbox. The play was too far beyond the powers of every one concerned. It is only necessary to point out that the abrupt transition, the shift from a strong emotion to an irrelevancy, is possibly the most difficult technical feat in the actor's art.

However, this failure of the Washington Square Players had no criminal element of low aim. At the worst, it merely proved that it takes longer to develop a company of competent actors out of a group of amateurs than we impatient Americans like to fancy. At best, it showed that the Players are ambitious, and wish to use their successes as stepping

stones, dreading the commonplace more than failure, the easily popular more than the difficult and the exotic. The important thing is, not that they have failed at their first attempt at a four-act play, but that they have succeeded by many happy productions of one-act plays in persuading the public to come to see them in the longer work—in short, that they are now an accepted theatrical institution in New York, and are going on to wider effort. Beginning a year and a half ago as theatrical amateurs, this group of young enthusiasts have by talent and intelligence and cooperative enthusiasm stormed the forces of entrenched professionalism, and given to New York its liveliest theatre. In a little over a year they have produced thirty short plays and pantomimes, nineteen of them original native works, as well as two long plays; they have discovered in Philip Moeller and Lewis Beach, especially, writers of talent; they have given to young scenic artists opportunities for free experiment in stage pictures; and finally, they have demonstrated that persistent and intelligent practice of acting, even by amateurs, can develop a company of players the public will pay to see, though eighteen months will not make them finished actors. In short, they have at least begun to prove that what

the Abbey Theatre players did in Dublin is not impossible in New York.

And if it not impossible in New York it is not impossible elsewhere in America. Curiously enough, the other spot on the map of the United States where the amateur spirit seems at present to be accomplishing the most in the theatre is North Dakota. Under the leadership of Frederick Henry Koch at the University of North Dakota, pageants are being written by groups of people cooperatively, and acted and staged by the community. Professor Arvold of the North Dakota Agricultural College has devised a "Little Country Theatre" which serves the small communities, the people of these communities themselves being the actors. The theatrical life of the countryside within the sphere of influence of these two universities is in some part spontaneously fostered by the people themselves, not supplied to them by outsiders. The amateur spirit is making a theatre there, and some day it will no doubt make a drama.

There have been numerous attempts in recent years to start so-called little theatres in various cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Indianapolis. But in too many cases they have come to grief, and

upon inspection of the wreck the shrewd observer has discovered that they were not in reality a spontaneous, democratic growth, but superimposed from above by some person or persons of wealth. A genuine demand for them did not exist, and a genuine enthusiasm for acting, writing, scene painting, staging, was not sufficiently manifest in a large enough group of potential artists. Samuel Eliot, Jr., went out from the Bandbox Theatre to be director of the Indianapolis Little Theatre last autumn—and only with the utmost difficulty could secure casts for his productions; which simply meant that Indianapolis was not yet ready for such an experiment. It was superimposed, not spontaneously engendered by the enthusiasm and ambitions of the potential artists themselves.

Probably very few cities or sections of the country are ready, as yet. Nevertheless, more and more people everywhere are beginning to see a light. More and more people are beginning to realize that the allied arts of the theatre can, and ought to be, a field for wholesome self-expression, not merely for exploitation by Broadway shop keepers. More and more people are realizing that each community has a right to its own theatre, its own dramatic idiom, and that the only way the community can ever achieve its

own theatre is to set out to develop it from the bottom, by its own efforts. More and more people are beginning to realize a truth some of us have been reiterating for years—that the future development of the American theatre must come through a renaissance in the practical theatre itself of the amateur spirit, brought into the theatre by amateurs who, with proper and intelligent leadership, will remain to become self-respecting professional artists, or else by the existing professionals themselves breaking away from the present chains of exploitation.

And because the Washington Square Players have demonstrated the entire possibility of such a renaissance, right in the citadel of smug, money-grubbing exploitation, New York City, their success is the most important thing just now in the American theatre.

THE END

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